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FOR THE SECOND TIME SHE DISAPPEARED

Page 81

Frontispiece

“Operations Successfully Executed”

BY

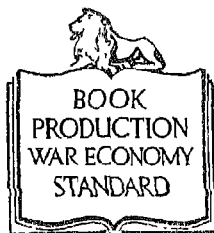
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“Secret Convoy &c

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Contents

CHAP.	Page
I. CARELESS CONVERSATION - - - - -	7
II. RECALLED - - - - -	15
III. THE RENDEZVOUS - - - - -	21
IV. FIREWORKS AT THE ADMIRALTY - - - - -	37
V. "NAZI-CONTROLLED" - - - - -	48
VI. UNDER TRAINING - - - - -	62
VII. ESCORT DUTIES - - - - -	78
VIII. FRANKVILLE - - - - -	87
IX. "SLIPPERY AS AN EEL" - - - - -	96
X. H.M. CARRIER "TURPENTINE" - - - - -	105
XI. FORESTALLED - - - - -	117
XII. ESCAPE - - - - -	123
XIII. NEMESIS - - - - -	133
XIV. IN THE FIRST WATCH - - - - -	138
XV. CHRISTMAS - - - - -	145
XVI. THE CHOSEN THREE - - - - -	159
XVII. NOSING INTO THE FIORD - - - - -	168
XVIII. THE TOUCHSTONE OF PERIL - - - - -	176
XIX. "SUCCESSFULLY CARRIED OUT" - - - - -	189

Illustrations

							Facing Page
FOR THE SECOND TIME SHE DISAPPEARED	-					<i>Frontispiece</i>	
"CAN YOU GIVE US OUR POSITION?"	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
HANS SCHENK GETS AWAY	-	-	-	-	-	-	128
A GREAT RECEPTION	-	-	-	-	-	-	192

“Operations . Successfully Executed”

CHAPTER I

Careless Conversation

Lieutenant John Septimus Cloche, R.N.V.R., lowered himself into a seat and surveyed the limited vista. What he saw was good—at least there was nothing to remind him of the fact that there was a war on, and had been on for well over four years with the end not yet in sight.

Five months had elapsed since he was last afloat, yet he had not forgotten the lift of the sea and the sensation of speed when riding over the waves at a rate of something approaching forty-five knots. Yes, five months! Most of it spent in hospital! He owed Fritz something for that.

Three days ago he'd had his final “medical”, had been passed fit for duty, and had been sent off on seven days' leave with orders to report for duty at the Otherport naval base before noon on the following Monday.

So not being keen on spending his leave in Town, Cloche had gone to stay at a small hotel in a little village only a few miles from Torquay. He meant

8 Operations Successfully Executed

to put in a good deal of time in tramping the moors; but alas for this resolution, he'd gone into Torquay for the afternoon by means of an overcrowded motor-bus, and sat down to rest on a seat facing the sea.

It was a public seat—one of those with a curved back—placed close to a path and enclosed on three sides by trees. In front was a row of bushes, sufficiently high to cut off the sight of the foreshore with its forlorn festoons of concertina wire. In that direction John had a view of most of Torbay, and of what he saw there was nothing to remind him of the deadliest war in the history of mankind.

The late autumnal sun glinted on the dancing waters. There were actually small sailing craft putting out of harbour, and they reminded him of a day in August, 1939, when he sailed his little cutter across Torbay on his way to the Solent. He'd never "fetched" his intended destination. On the 3rd of September, war was declared. His yacht, willy-nilly, had been laid up near Poole, and there she was and probably would remain until some time after peace was declared. Then he'd have her refitted and sail her back to her home port, a Cornish one, if—and a lot depended upon that "if"—he survived, fit both in body and mind.

Time was when, with many another youth, John had secretly wished that the war might continue indefinitely. From a selfish point of view he had regarded life afloat in the R.N.V.R. as far preferable to swotting in a bank.

With certain reservations he didn't think that now. He'd seen more than enough to prove to his

entire satisfaction that war is a beastly business. He'd lost count of his comrades and chums—not only serving with him but in other branches of the fighting forces, the Royal Air Force in particular—who had made the Great Sacrifice because ex-Corporal Hitler had tried, at first with remarkable success, to enslave the world.

He was looking forward with eagerness to the great day when the last shot would be fired in grim earnest—provided, without the shadow of a doubt, that the banners of the United Nations would float over Berlin and Tokio—but he certainly didn't want to have to return to his post at the bank. What he hoped would happen would be that a considerable number of R.N.V.R. officers would be transferred with permanent commissions to the Royal Navy.

Sitting there, John had no reason to revise his recent opinion. Torquay had received sundry and various attentions from enemy raiders, but the damage done was small compared with that upon Plymouth and Exeter. A few buildings near the harbour had been demolished, and generally speaking, casual visitors to Torquay would have some trouble in discovering definite traces of the Luftwaffe's spasmodic visits to the South Devon watering-place.

There certainly was nothing to be seen of that nature from the alcove where Cloche was enjoying the outlook.

Yet hidden by a low row of evergreens was the crowded lower promenade. Khaki was the pre-

10 Operations Successfully Executed

dominant colour, relieved by "flashes", "titles", and other distinctive markings that had been recently sanctioned by the War Office to brighten up the otherwise sombre battle-dress of the British army. There were plenty of airmen and W.A.A.F.s, and a smaller representative sprinkling of the Senior Service.

There were Canadian, South African, New Zealand airmen, with scattered representatives from British Crown Colonies; but—and this is what struck Cloche most—there was a marked proportion of men in olive-green uniforms and wearing forage caps that differed from those worn by the British Tommy. The American Doughboy had his feet firmly planted on British soil, and there he meant to stop until the time came for the gigantic combined operations that were to drive the Boche out of Western Europe, and would not cease until the standards of the United Nations floated over the ruins of Berlin!

Along the upper and almost unfrequented path came a couple of soldiers. One, a short, thickset man, was wearing the battle-dress of the British army. The other, who overtopped his companion by a good six inches, was in the greenish-grey uniform of the American Expeditionary Force. By the soft, not unpleasing tone of the American's voice, John guessed him to be from the Southern States.

The two men stopped and then sat down on the opposite end of the bench that Cloche was occupying. Each had his grievance which he proceeded to ventilate, hoping to enlist, if possible, the sym-

pathies of the "civvy", as they erroneously though reasonably took John to be.

The British Tommy's grouse was the terrifically high price he and his mates had to pay for cigarettes, even when taking into consideration the weekly issue at a reduced rate.

"It's all very fine for you blokes," he added. "Look what pay you Yanks are gettin'!"

"Sure thing, buddy," agreed the man from Alabama tolerantly. "If we're offered five dollars a day would we say 'Nope. One dollar 'ud do us fine'? I guess not."

"Wish I'd the chance of earning that," sighed the British Tommy.

"Easy come, easy go," continued the American. "Most folk over here are just swell, but some take us for a mob of suckers. I guess some of us are. . . . What's that, boss? You wanna light? Sure."

The interruption was caused by the arrival of a middle-aged man of nondescript appearance. He might have been connected with the sea, or he might have been a munition worker on holiday.

He, too, sat down and, having lighted a cigarette by means of the American's automatic lighter, proceeded to offer his case.

"How do you like this part of the country?" he asked. "Bit different from the States, I reckon?"

"You've said it," agreed the American guardedly.

"Used to be on the Noo York-Liverpool run myself," volunteered the newcomer. "Fine city Noo York."

"Never was there," declared the American.

12 Operations Successfully Executed

"Wot was that you were saying about a mob of suckers, chum?" asked the Tommy, resenting the intrusion of a third party.

"Aw! Jus' to give you one example. We're encamped at Dashleigh. That's about three miles from here."

"A little over two," amended the civilian. "Go on; I know what you're going to say, something about that beat-up last night."

"Nothin' doing," declared the Yankee imperturbably. "You might be a 'tec for all I know, but you've got nothin' on me."

"I'm no 'tec," rejoined the other indignantly. "I reckon you fellows were perfectly right. Wish I'd been there to see the blighter take his medicine."

"Why, wot 'appened?" asked the Tommy, his curiosity overcoming his resentment of the other man's presence.

Judging by the narrative, John gathered that a rapacious taxi-man had taken five American soldiers from Torquay to their camp at Dashleigh—a distance of a little over two miles—and had charged them three pounds a head. The next night he tried the same sort of thing, but half-way to their destination the Americans made him stop, beat him up, and left him the poorer by some twenty pounds.

"Serve the swine right!" declared the Tommy stoutly. "Did he complain to the police?"

"I guess not," replied the American. "He'd be afraid to, 'cause they'd take his licence away. It's taught him a lesson some!"

John went on smoking. The conversation, though

not directly addressed to him, seemed in part to be intended for him to hear. In a way it interested him to hear other people's points of view, especially the Doughboy's.

At the same time the civilian member of the trio intrigued him. He couldn't place him. He didn't look like a seaman, yet he had mentioned he'd been on the Liverpool-New York "run".

"Had enough of the sea," declared the man. "Got a shore job, building invasion barges at Sandquay. The river's stiff with them. So's every creek and pill between here an' Falmouth. Looks as if you chaps'll be on the Second Front come Christmas. Don't you think so?"

The American, thus appealed to, worked his jaws for a few seconds.

"Think?" he echoed. "Think nope. And the President of the Yewnited States just didn't mention the date when he said good-bye!"

"That's a nasty snub," thought Cloche.

The garrulous man evidently didn't think so, and went on with the conversation, asking questions that could certainly not be termed discreet and talking about himself and his war job.

From this John gathered that he was a shipwright, that his name was Trefusis—Anthony Trefusis—and that he was having a day off but was due back at Dartmouth that evening.

He wasn't getting much change out of the soldiers. They were decidedly bored with his company, replying to his questions in monosyllables or else answering in a way that left no doubt in John's

14 Operations Successfully Executed

mind that they were pulling the other fellow's leg!

After a while the Tommy and the Doughboy heaved themselves out of the seat and strolled off, leaving Trefusis and John together.

"It's a wonder those two didn't start scrapping," observed the former.

"Scrapping! Why?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I," rejoined John. "As a matter of fact, they seemed good pals. I rather admired the Yank for the way he dealt with some of your questions."

"What questions?"

"Well, about the Second Front," replied John, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and preparing to rise. "Rather indiscreet of you, you know."

"They didn't know."

"I don't suppose they did," agreed John cheerfully. "You'd like to know. Well, I'll tell you:

"Accurate evidence have I none.

But my aunt's charwoman's sister's son

Heard a policeman on his beat

Say to a nursemaid down our street

That he knew a man with a cat's-meat cart

Who said he knew when the Second Front would
start!"

Except for the last line the doggerel wasn't original. John couldn't remember where or when he'd heard most of it. He'd recited it more or less on the spur of the moment.

The man calling himself Anthony Trefusis sat

bolt upright. If he saw any humour in the verse he gave no sign.

Then abruptly he rose to his feet and shambled off.

"Rummy cove!" thought John. "Well, I suppose I'd better be getting back. . . . Hello! What's that?"

Underneath the bench where the man had been sitting was a pencil. It had evidently slipped from his pocket, and had dropped through the spatted seat to the ground.

It was too late to shout to the presumed owner, and John was not inclined to go after him.

He stooped and picked up the object.

It looked new. The sharpened point was protected by a celluloid cover. The pencil itself was painted yellow and bore the inscription: *Smith Co. Inc., Salem, Mass., U.S.A.*

He slipped the pencil into his breast pocket.

"Not worth reporting that find to the police!" he thought.

As subsequent events proved it was a decided pity that he didn't!

CHAPTER II

Recalled

"There'll be a letter for you, sir," announced the landlord of the little hotel at which John was

16 Operations Successfully Executed

staying. "Didn't know as 'ow you were an officer, sir."

"I suppose I should have mentioned that when I registered?"

"You should a' done, sir, but there's no harm done, in a manner o' speakin'. Done twenty-one years in the navy myself, sir. Master-at-Arms I was, though they call it Regulating C.P.O. nowa-days, I believe. Being nigh on sixty they wouldn't have me back, so all I can do is to be in, the 'Ome Guard."

"And pretty useful too!"

"Maybe, if there weren't so many useless parades," rejoined the landlord gloomily, adding, "Your letter's in the rack, sir!"

It was in a buff envelope, bearing the words "On His Majesty's Service". John eyed it with obvious mistrust. He'd made no arrangement for his private correspondence to be forwarded. Apparently this one—official—had been sent from his depot ship at Otherport and could mean only one thing: that for some reason, which might or might not be explained in the contents, his leave had been curtailed, and that he was to be recalled before the original date on which he was to report for duty.

According to regulations, he'd left his temporary address before proceeding on leave. The envelope bore the Otherport postmark, but on closer examination he discovered that it bore the crest of the Admiralty Foul Anchor and that it had been posted from London and had been readdressed to him from the Otherport naval base.

Making his way to the dining-room, John slit the envelope with a knife and withdrew its contents.

He gave a low whistle of relief and gratification.

The half-sheet of paper was headed Room 445c, Admiralty, S.W.1.

Dear Seven Bells,

Can you possibly blow in here at about eleven on Friday next. There's a rather important proposition I'd like to put to you. I can't even hint at its nature, but I think it will appeal to you. Hope you're fit again by now. In fact you must be!

Yours sincerely,

Alan Mallett.

So his old skipper hadn't forgotten him. He had even addressed him by his nickname! Possibly Mallett had been given another ship—a destroyer—and had been “pulling the strings up topsides” in order to get his former Sub appointed to her. This was luck indeed! He'd be sorry to have to leave the Motor Gunboat Flotilla, but it would be glorious to serve in a destroyer and under Alan Mallett again.

Next Friday—and to-day was Thursday. The letter bore the previous Tuesday's date and had taken three days to come from the Admiralty via the Otherport naval base.

Obviously John had to keep the appointment. There were, however, many difficulties that had to be surmounted somehow. His uniform for one

18 Operations Successfully Executed

thing. He'd sent that along to Otherport. There certainly wouldn't be time to break his journey to Town and "shift". He'd have to present himself at the Admiralty in plain clothes and risk the consequences. Even so, could he get to London in time?

He rang the bell. The landlord appeared.

"Yes, sir?"

"I have to report at the Admiralty by eleven to-morrow."

"Very good, sir!"

"But it isn't any too good," rejoined John. "Do you happen to know how the trains run?"

"Well, sir, there ain't no train for Oldtown Priors to-night. You can pick up the bus from here to Oldtown and catch the last one to Exeter. Then, if you're lucky, you'll catch the mail train to Town. You'll not be wanting your room?"

"Unfortunately, for some reasons, no; and I'll have to cut out dinner."

The landlord shook his head.

"You won't make it any quicker by going without a 'good square meal,' sir. There's duck and green peas. I'll pass the word to the missus to put things a bit for'ard like. Last bus from Oldtown isn't till a quarter to nine, so there's no need to break blood-vessels. . . . An' a nice lil' drop of home-brewed cider, sir? There isn't any whisky, brandy or rum to be had nowhere about here."

"Thanks, cider. I'll pack before dinner."

Although he was in a bit of a hurry, John thoroughly enjoyed his meal; then, having settled

his bill—a modest one judging by current standards—he made his way along the deserted village street to the bus stop on the first stage of his journey to Town.

It was a pitch-dark night. New moon was at about three o'clock and consequently useless from a lighting aspect. The sky was heavily overcast, blacking out the stars. It was cold too. It made John wish he was wearing his bridge-coat instead of his light though wind-proof raincoat.

Presently, though ten minutes late, the local bus arrived.

“Don't you worry, sir,” declared the conductress, in reply to his anxious inquiry; “Exeter bus'll wait until we're in.”

It might, but already this one had almost a full complement. John managed to find an upper-deck seat at the rear of the vehicle.

The second stage of his journey promised to be decidedly uncomfortable and uninteresting. The crowded bus reeked of humanity. Condensation clouded the windows, although in any case it was too dark to see anything outside. Inside pale-blue lamps threw a ghostly light upon the heads and backs of his fellow-passengers.

He had a bit of a shock when the conductress called out “Teignmouth”. He hadn't come through that seaside place on his outward journey. He appealed to his next-door passenger for information and was told that this was the Exeter express and that it went by the coast route.

No one alighted at Teignmouth, but four addi-

20 Operations Successfully Executed

tional passengers boarded the bus and had to stand in the narrow alleyway.

The next stop was at Dawlish. Here a man in the front part of the bus stood up and made his way with difficulty past those already standing.

At the head of the stairs the lamplight played upon his features.

John recognized the man. It was the fellow at Torquay who'd given his name as Tre-something, what exactly he couldn't remember.

"I think I have something of yours!" he announced, his hand going to the inside pocket of his coat.

But the man either didn't or wouldn't hear. Ramming the brim of his hat more firmly over his eyes, he descended the steps with a hurried clatter of nail-studded boots.

The bell rang and the bus renewed its way.

"Hang it! He wasn't deaf this afternoon," thought John. "He didn't look at all pleased to see me, but he must have recognized me. . . . Dash it all! that's funny! I remember him saying he had to be at Dartmouth this evening, and here he is going in the opposite direction and by the last bus. No business of mine, but there's something fishy about that merchant. He's not exactly what one might call jonnick."

CHAPTER III

The Rendezvous

Ober-leutnant Hans Schenk, known to a good many people in South Devon as Anthony Trefusis, alighted from the bus at Dawlish in a decidedly rattled state of mind. Engaging in casual conversation—although “with intent”, to use an expression current in police circles—was one thing. To be challenged by one such casual acquaintance when that was one of the last things he wanted to happen to him was quite another.

“I think I have something of yours!”

Those were the words. Somehow it sounded like a challenge. The youngish, clean-shaven man who had tried to stop him couldn't be anyone but a detective!

With his heart pounding violently against his ribs Schenk alighted, ready to take to his heels.

Somehow he resisted that almost overpowering desire. He waited, quite expecting to see the man who had spoken to him alight and place a detaining hand on his shoulder. There was no one within sight. Once the bus proceeded on its way, then Hans would not hesitate to use his automatic pistol fitted with a silencer. . . .

But no one else alighted.

Again the conductress rang the bell, and the vehicle lurched off to be lost to sight and sound in the darkness of the night.

22 Operations Successfully Executed

Hans Schenk was alone. He heaved a sigh of relief. The man who had spoken to him in the bus hadn't followed him. Perhaps, after all, he wasn't a British Secret Service agent.

With the assurance of one acquainted with the locality, the German set off in the direction of the Exe estuary. He had plenty of time to keep his appointment. It was now half-past nine. Along this part of the South Coast of England, west of Portland Bill, high water at "full and change" occurs somewhere about six o'clock. He wanted a rising tide—any time after dead low water—so that it wouldn't serve any useful purpose if he arrived at the rendezvous before midnight.

On the other hand, it would be a risky business to hang about in the little town of Dawlish. In wartime all strangers were at night objects of suspicion, even though the fear of invasion had receded almost to vanishing point.

By the time Schenk reached the outskirts of the town, without meeting a single soul, his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness. There was a faint luminosity over the sea on his right. To his left the rounded tops of a chain of sand-dunes loomed up against the cloud-shrouded sky.

He left the road and, walking cautiously, made his way through a gap in some rusty concertina wire. A few steps farther on brought him to a derelict and deserted pill-box.

Within the last one hundred and fifty years the British Isles, particularly the south-eastern and southern coastal districts of England, had been

several times threatened with invasion, and after each occasion there had remained and was still in evidence relics of the defensive measures taken against a foe that had never set foot on British soil.

Bonaparte's Army of England, encamped for so long and so ineffectually at Boulogne, had been responsible for the erection of a chain of Martello towers, many of which still survive if only as freak seaside residences—or at least did, prior to the fateful 3rd of September, 1939.

Then in the 'sixties, when Napoleon III's military ambitions led to another invasion scare—and incidentally the creation of a volunteer force somewhat resembling the present-day Home Guard—numerous brick fortifications with gun-covered roofs and deep dry moats sprang up in the vicinity of Portsmouth, Chatham, Devonport and other military garrison towns. These fortifications, or at least several of them, still remain as evidence that even the government of the day hadn't implicit faith in the Royal Navy as Britain's sure shield; although in those days, and down to the time when Blériot flew across the Channel, Britain had all the advantages of an island.

Next came the Great War of 1914–1918, with aviation still in its infancy and the British navy still supreme. That left, amongst other things, an aftermath in the form of conspicuous, ill-sited, concrete pill-boxes that under conditions of modern warfare would be nothing less than death-traps for the defenders manning them.

Then in the present titanic world war the threat

24 Operations Successfully Executed

of invasion became a very real thing. The disaster of Dunkirk—for although the bulk of the British Expeditionary Army had been safely evacuated, all its arms and equipment had had to be abandoned—had given the ex-Austrian corporal the chance of his lifetime, and unaccountably he had failed to grasp it.

Immediately after Dunkirk frantic and often ill-advised operations were undertaken to repel the expected invaders. All over the country, actuated by the principle of Defence in Depth, trenches had been dug, pill-boxes built, and miles and miles of barbed wire laid down in all sorts of unexpected places. In addition, miles of tubular steel fencing were erected, tragically conspicuous from the air and certainly useless for the purpose to which they were intended, namely to hinder tank operations.

Once again the threat of invasion had receded, almost, if not quite, to vanishing point. Thanks mainly to two causes—the brilliant successes of the Soviet armies in the east and the undoubted superiority of the British, American and Allied Air Forces in other sectors of the vast field of operations—the Luftwaffe was now almost entirely on the defensive. Without clear-cut air superiority, which he did not by this time possess and would never be able to obtain, Hitler's dream of conquest had been dissipated. Like Napoleon, he was within sight of his Hundred Days to culminate in another Waterloo.

The blockhouses and the barbed wire still remained. Already the former had been abandoned to the ravages of the weather and now served as

happy hunting grounds for the children of the neighbourhood. The camouflaged netting had long since disappeared but not so the barbed wire. Overgrown by brambles, a trap for the unwary, the wire would doubtless remain for years after the last shell had been fired and the last bomb dropped upon Reich territory.

Cautiously *Ober-leutnant* Hans Schenk approached the abandoned pill-box. As he had expected, it was deserted. The door, hanging by one hinge, was ajar. Over the entrance trailed the tangled remnants of what was once a camouflaged net. Six hundred yards away was a Royal Observer Corps post, but there was little likelihood of any of the manning party coming anywhere near the pill-box.

Having satisfied himself that his temporary shelter was unoccupied, Schenk retraced his steps to the gap in the barbed wire. Working almost entirely by his sense of touch, he dragged the ends of the coils close together and knotted them with a stout piece of cord.

He was now fairly safe from interruption. In any case no one, except a belated soldier and his lass, was likely to be on the dunes at that time of night.

Making his way to the seaward side of the pill-box, the German leant against its concrete wall and directed his gaze across the dim waste of water. For miles in either direction not a light was visible, but in the distance, both to the east and to the west, searchlights were slowly sweeping the sky. There were other searchlight positions—dozens of them

26 Operations Successfully Executed

—in the more immediate vicinity, but these he knew would not be brought into operation except in the event of an air raid. Resentfully he recalled the fact that during his stay in the West Country—a visit extending to nearly three months—not once had he heard the raucous notes of an air-raid warning. There had been times when, in command of a U-boat based at Cherbourg, he had seen a constant nightly procession of the *Luftwaffe* passing overhead in the direction of England. Now the boot was on the other foot. His parents and several of his near relations lived in Berlin—or did. . . .

Hans Schenk, although still under thirty years of age, had already had an exciting and chequered career.

He had first gone to sea as an apprentice in the Norddeutscher Lloyd line, plying between Bremen, Southampton, Cherbourg and New York. Speaking English fluently, he had spent some time between voyages in playing the rôle of a commercial traveller.

When war broke out he, as a reserve officer of the German navy, was appointed to a commerce raider that got no farther than the Elbe lightship. A British mine-laying submarine had paid that waterway a visit a few hours earlier.

After an all-too-brief instructional course Schenk was appointed to a U-boat as her *Unter-leutnant*. Promotion in that branch of the German navy was rapid, thanks to causes well understood and not altogether appreciated. He found himself in command of a U-boat early in 1941.

Returning to base after her third cruise, *Ober-leutnant* Schenk, as he now was, reported having sunk a British cruiser of 8000 tons and a large tanker. As one immediate result he was received by the Fuehrer who bestowed upon him a decoration, and his glorious achievements broadcast on Berlin radio.

Unfortunately for him, the British Admiralty took a somewhat unusual course. The sinking of both craft was categorically denied and a statement issued to the effect that on the date claimed by the German U-boat commander, and in the position given by him, a sloop had certainly been torpedoed but had been able to return to her base. The "large tanker" was revealed to be a Spanish cargo vessel of a mere one thousand tons displacement!

Schenk might have made a genuine mistake. On both occasions the attack had been made on a fairly dark night and he had been the only officer to sight the quarry through the periscope. He thought he'd seen both vessels sunk, and imagination and an over-zealous desire for recognition had done the rest.

Following the British Admiralty's disclosures, Schenk had a particularly thin time. He was dismissed from the German navy and informed that he must undertake espionage work in Great Britain and the United States. He was to retain his rank as a kind of safeguard should he be arrested, and given to understand that his complete reinstatement as a German officer depended solely upon the successful results of his work as a Secret Service agent and saboteur.

28 Operations Successfully Executed

He had now completed his second term of service in England and to-night, according to plan, he was to be picked up and taken back to Germany, there to make his report and be given fresh instructions.

Hans had been fairly successful in his latest mission. He might have done better had he possessed a single-tracked mind. Like most Germans he had the tendency to be too inquisitive, and on more than one occasion it had got him into tight corners from which, however, he had managed to extricate himself.

After a while he glanced at his wrist-watch. It showed that the time was a quarter to eleven; more than an hour to go!

"If only I dared smoke," he thought.

He knew he couldn't. It would be too risky even inside the pill-box. One of his stock subjects when getting into conversation with strangers with the ultimate object of picking up information was the present price of tobacco. He had only to suggest that it was a ramp on the part of the Government and that the tax on what was virtually a necessity to hundreds and thousands of people was out of all proportion to the original value of the weed, and he was assured of a sympathetic hearing.

But he knew perfectly well that in Germany tobacco was both dear and scarce, and even if one were fortunate in obtaining the stated ration of cigarettes they weren't to be compared in quality with those so readily obtainable in Britain.

He felt in his inside coat pocket for his cigarette

case. A certain amount of satisfaction could be obtained by chewing the end of an unlighted cigarette.

The case was a leatherette one, opening like a book. As he fumbled with the clasp he thought he heard something fall to the ground.

"That must be my last pencil," he thought.

Stooping, he peered at the sandy, grass-grown ground, but without the desired result.

"Ach, no matter!" he decided. "It's gone and no mistake about it."

Pinching off about half an inch of cigarette, he extricated the tobacco from the paper and placed it in his mouth. Then he replaced the case.

A shower of rain drove him to take shelter in the pill-box. He hated rain as much as a cat does, although, seaman-like, he didn't mind salt spray in the least.

Then the interior of the place was lit up by a bright glare coming in through the seaward machine-gun aperture.

Without hesitation, Hans placed his fingers on his pulse and waited until a dull roar was borne to his ears.

"Fifteen seconds; roughly five kilometres," he muttered. "Now if that is a depth-charge——"

He went outside and waited. If a surface craft or a bomber were attacking there would be more than one depth-charge dropped. There'd be a "pattern" as the English termed it.

But no other flash illumined the sky, so it seemed as if the U-boat sent to pick him up hadn't been

30 Operations Successfully Executed

attacked. That was a comforting thought, to be succeeded by the possibility that, perhaps, the U-boat had bumped against a mine—perhaps a German one! If so, all this waiting and watching would be in vain.

“Strange thoughts come into one’s mind when one is waiting,” he soliloquized. “Why should it be U₄₀₁ that blew up? I don’t even know from what direction the flash came. It might have been caused by a drifting mine being swept on to a rock.”

The time passed with exasperating slowness until the hands of his watch showed that it was a quarter to midnight.

Then picking up his small suitcase, Schenk unfastened the cord from the coils of barbed wire, and groped his way down to the beach by a rough path.

At the water’s edge, keeping an eye both on the now rising tide and the dark expanse of sea, he waited with every sense on the alert.

He *hadn’t been there more than ten minutes* when he thought he heard the sound of muffled oars—muffled because they made no noise in the crutches but only as the blades dipped beneath the surface.

He wasn’t mistaken. The boat grounded about thirty feet from shore. A man stepped over the gunwale and waded towards the waiting Schenk.

“*Herr Ober-leutnant?*” inquired the former in a low voice.

“*Hier! Zur Zeit!*”

The man came closer, wading through the shoaling water in his rubber thigh boots.

"I will have to carry you on my back, *Herr Officier!*" he whispered.

"Do so. How far have you to row?"

"A kilometre, perhaps a little more."

"You heard a detonation about an hour ago?"

"Did we not! It shook us. The *Kapitan* is of opinion that an English bomber unloaded before crossing the coast. . . . Keep her steady, Karl!"

Hans found himself lowered until his feet touched the bottom boards of a collapsible dinghy. She was manned by a crew of two, one being the petty officer who had brought him off, the other, Karl, having remained with the boat.

Without hesitation, the *Ober-leutnant* took the tiller. The others manned their oars.

"What's the course?" inquired Hans, glancing at the small luminous compass on the stern grating.

The petty officer gave him the desired bearing: *sud, funf, ost*. Having been relieved of this part of the responsibility, he seemed content to let the *Oberleutnant* have the task of finding the parent U-boat.

Schenk didn't feel too happy. He had to steer entirely by compass. There wasn't a single star visible by which he could save his eyes from peering into the compass bowl, where the light, dim though it was, was a hindrance rather than a help to his sight.

Doubts began to assail him. Had he been given the correct course? Had the U-boat been compelled

32 Operations Successfully Executed

to shift her position during the last hour? Had she been caught, all unsuspecting, in a counter-eddy and swept perhaps two or even three kilometres up or down the coast?

The two men were pulling with long even strokes. Their oars made hardly any sound. Only the *swish* of the bluff bows and the swirl of water^a past the rudder gave any indication that the dinghy was moving. There wasn't even any trace of phosphorescence to mark her way.

"It is time we sighted her," observed Schenk. "Lay on your oars."

The boat lost way. Both oarsmen crouched on the bottom boards with their eyes peering over the gunwale. Experience had taught them that, within certain limitations, the best way to pick up an object on a dark night was to observe from a point as close to sea level as possible.

"I see nothing," declared the petty officer in a low voice. "Do you, Karl?"

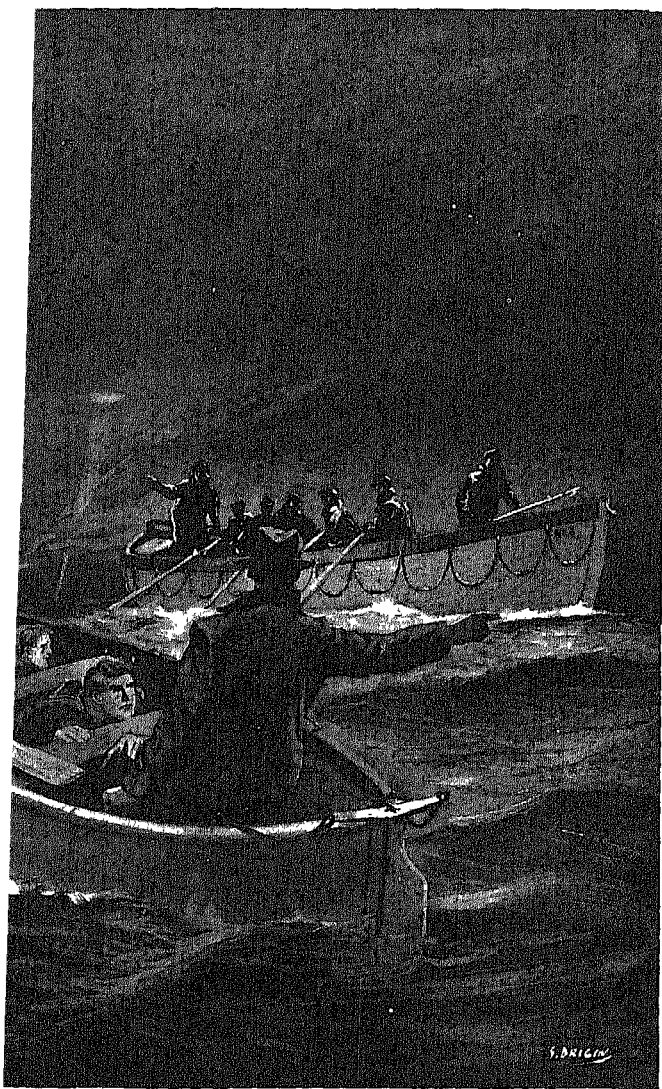
The seaman grunted a negative reply.

"But I hear engines," he added. "Motor-boat engines!"

Schenk heard the ominous sound too. Somewhere out there a British M.T.B. or M.G.B. was approaching at high speed.

"She will not close the shore here," he declared, "but she may pass too close to be pleasant. Move forward a bit, petty officer. Both of you keep your heads down!"

Hans and the two men coiled themselves on the bottom boards, waiting. . . .



o 00

"CAN YOU GIVE US OUR POSITION?"

Page 36

The noise increased. Above the sound of the powerful engines came the constant thud as the motor craft planed over the slight swell.

Not daring to look, Schenk waited until the roar began to decrease. The vessel had passed them at perhaps less than half a cable's distance, evidently without spotting the U-boat's dinghy.

Then came the wash. Caught almost broadside on by the first bow wave, the canvas boat was tossed about like a cork. Water cascaded over both gun-wales. A violent lurch sent Schenk's head into painful contact with the after thwart. He had visions of having to attempt the almost impossible task of having to swim for an invisible shore on a pitch-black night.

The wash subsided. One of the men found a bailer and began to eject the water swirling over the bottom boards. The dinghy had survived this part of her ordeal.

"It looks as if we will have to make for the shore," declared Schenk. "It is unfortunate. You'll be made prisoners of war."

Both men received this information in silence. Neither dared to express his thoughts on that subject. If they had they would have been unanimous on one point: that it would be better by far to be a prisoner of war in British hands than to continue in the German submarine service. Things had been going badly with the U-boats. Far too many had left their bases never to return. Neither by day nor by night, neither in harbour nor far out in the wide Atlantic were Hitler's *Unterseebooten*

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34 Operations Successfully Executed

safe. It was a most disquieting, nerve-racking thought.

"We'll wait another half an hour," decided the *Ober-leutnant*. "Here! Where's the compass?"

A search, hurried at first and then most painstaking, resulted in the knowledge that that most important instrument of navigation was no longer in the boat. The terrific lurch when the motor-boat's wash had struck the dinghy had jerked the compass overboard.

It was a decidedly awkward situation. Had British bluejackets found themselves in somewhat similar conditions off the French coast, they would have made a gallant attempt to row across the Channel—"Sixty miles ain't it? We can do that on our heads, though mebbe we'll be picked up by some of our light naval forces before we've made half the distance!" But no such thought arose in Schenk's mind or those of his companions. They more or less resigned themselves to drifting in their canvas boat until it was light enough to discern the Devon coast. Schenk alone was perturbed at the thought. He didn't want to find himself under arrest. It would be awkward, nay hopeless, to have to explain to his captors how he came ashore, presumably from a U-boat, in plain clothes. Given the chance, he'd slip off directly they landed and leave the two German seamen to fend for themselves.

It was now one o'clock—another five long weary hours to dawn. Overhead a star was shining through a rift in the clouds. The off-shore wind was hardening. It might be blowing half a gale before sunrise.

Already the breakers were growling ominously on the not far distant Monster and Pole sands guarding the intricate estuary of the Exe.

"Oars!" hissed Karl. "Over there!"

A boat was approaching.

"Get down, both of you!" ordered the *Ober-leutnant*. "And take your caps off!"

Sitting bolt upright in the sternsheets, Hans Schenk extended one arm over the side. In the darkness the attitude would be readily mistaken for that of a man holding a fishing line.

The on-coming craft was moving slowly through the water. Her crew were rowing raggedly, like men somewhat exhausted by a long spell at the heavy oars.

"Boat right ahead, sir!" shouted a hoarse voice.

The ship's lifeboat, for such she was, altered helm. At an order from the officer in command the men backed water. She lost way with about fifteen feet separating the two craft.

"Can you give us our position?" asked the officer in the sternsheets.

"Yes, roughly three miles due east of Teignmouth harbour," replied Schenk, without a moment's hesitation. "Don't attempt the bar before three-quarters' flood—that's at four o'clock. Then back her in; there'll be a breaking sea. Better wait for daylight and high water."

"Thank you!" was the reply.

"Who are you?" Hans ventured to inquire.

"Survivors of S.S. *Landsdown* from Newhaven for Falmouth with cement. We bumped against

36 Operations Successfully Executed

something a couple of hours ago and the old girl went down in a couple of minutes!"

"Hard lines!" rejoined Schenk. "Well, the best of luck!"

The ship's boat was swallowed up in the darkness.

Ober-leutnant Schenk had given the officer in charge reliable information and sound advice. It would have been a simple matter to have misled the Englanders and sent them to their deaths amongst the breakers of the outlying sands. That would have been quite in accord with Nazi principles. Why hadn't he?

The answer was that Schenk, although a German, was also a seaman. As such he had a respect for the time-honoured traditions of the sea, and to assist "distressed mariners" to the utmost that lay in his power was one of them.

A few minutes later Hans had his reward.

Running awash like a long razor-backed half-tide rock was U401. In fact the dinghy had to be rowed out of her way before her engines could be reversed.

"We'd given you up for lost," declared *Kapitan* Kemmler as Schenk painfully heaved himself over the U-boat's side. "We had trouble ourselves. We had to dive very suddenly in only twelve fathoms of water. . . . That all your gear? Let me see, you were a commercial traveller in the stationery line: I hope you have disposed of all your samples. If you haven't, Herr Schenk, I don't mind telling you that I prefer your room to your company!"

CHAPTER IV

Fireworks at the Admiralty

At a quarter to eleven Lieutenant John Septimus Cloche, R.N.V.R., presented himself at the main entrance to the Admiralty building. Whenever possible he made a point of being early on these and similar occasions, acting upon the principle that it was better to be a quarter of an hour too soon than half a minute too late.

To a certain degree he was feeling a bit sorry for himself. A long journey in an overcrowded night mail train, followed by a wearing and fruitless attempt to obtain a bedroom, had resulted in his having to spend from six in the morning to eight in the waiting-room of one of the London termini. After that his luck was more or less in, for he contrived to get a satisfying breakfast at a modest hotel. Also, having his safety razor with him, he was able to shave after a hot bath.

But the fact remained that he was conscious of his "plain" clothes—plain in a double sense. They did him all right for a holiday in Devonshire, even in pre-War fashionable Torquay, but they certainly weren't *comme il faut* in Town, especially when he was about to pay a visit to the Admiralty.

The sentry at the Horse Guards had completely

38 Operations Successfully Executed

ignored him because to all outward appearances he was a mere civilian. But he had given a salute to an officer with the rank badges of a brigadier, a fellow who in civil life (did John but know it) was a fraudulent solicitor and, although his defalcations had as yet not been discovered, was living in momentary dread of a hand descending upon his shoulder and a stern voice exclaiming, "I have a warrant for your arrest. . . ."

And again unknown to John and unnoticed by the sentry was a small insignificant-looking man in a Chesterfield and bowler hat. He was one of the "Back Room Boys", and in his brain-box under his bald domed forehead were hidden secrets that the German Government would have willingly given a fortune in hard cash to possess. . . .

John presented himself at the inquiry bureau in the lobby of the Admiralty building.

"Sir?"

A portly chief petty officer, his chest covered with decorations, eyed him interrogatively.

"I wish to see Commander Mallett, Room 445c."

"Appointment, sir?"

"Yes."

"Can I see your identity card, please?"

"Certainly."

John produced the distinctive card as issued to naval officers.

"Sorry, sir," exclaimed the C.P.O., raising his hand to the peak of his cap in a smart naval salute.

"Didn't know you were an officer."

"I don't see how you could have done," rejoined Cloche cheerfully.

"If you don't mind going to the waiting-room, sir, for a few minutes."

This John did, finding himself in company with a Captain, R.N., a Major of Marines, and a pair of painfully self-conscious sub-lieutenants of the R.N.V.R.

To John's mind they all seemed to be taking stock of him and wondering what that civilian fellow was doing there!

A Wren came in, holding John's pass, without which he might experience difficulty in leaving the building—more so than he had on entering it!

"Lieutenant Cloche?" she inquired.

The captain glanced at the major of marines and raised his eyebrows. His unspoken question was, "What's he doing here and not in uniform?"

Following his guide, John entered a lift that whisked him up to the fourth floor. Then along a corridor to the door of a room on which was painted 445c.

The Wren knocked.

"Lieutenant Cloche, sir!" she announced.

John entered. The door closed behind him. He was alone with his former skipper.

"I'm right glad to see you, Seven Bells!" exclaimed Mallett, extending his right hand. "So you fetched here all right!"

"Yes, sir. Sorry I had to be in plain clothes!"

Mallett waved the apology aside.

"What matters? Remember when we took

40 Operations Successfully Executed

Lamash into action for the last time against the Japs? Neither of us was in pukka uniform then."

John remembered. Was he ever likely to forget the destroyer's suicidal attack against the enemy cruisers? He was wearing shorts and a topee, and his commanding officer's rig was almost as scanty.

"But I didn't bring you up here to indulge in reminiscences," continued Commander Mallett briskly. "Time for that when we're both bald-headed. 'Sides, we haven't won the war yet, though, thank heavens, we're a jolly sight nearer to Victory than we were even twelve months ago. Look here: you've had a good deal of experience both in destroyers and M.T.B.s."

"M.G.B.s, sir," amended John.

"Then how would you like to extend the scope of your activities and go into the Trade?"

The suddenness of the proposition figuratively took the wind out of Cloche's sails. The Trade—otherwise the submarine service.

"I'd never considered that, sir."

"Well, then, consider it now," continued Mallett grimly. "I'll elucidate the subject, only you must understand that what I'm telling you is confidential—strictly confidential—and must not be divulged or even hinted at to any unauthorized person."

"Quite, sir, but I've had no experience in under-surface craft."

"That's to your advantage. We're building a new type of midget submarine that is a vast improvement on the Jap. An officer or man trained in sub-

marine duties in the present and large types would be at an obvious disadvantage in a midget. He'd have to forget a lot he had learned and to start all over again, so to speak. That isn't easy. There's a proverb to the effect that you can't teach old dogs new tricks. That may not be strictly true, but it would be easier and speedier to start from scratch. I may be expressing myself clumsily, but I hope you see what I mean. Put it this way: the normal complement of a submarine of the *Swordfish* class is forty, and every man knows and performs his special job. In these midgets there'll be a crew of three only, and their jobs are more or less interchangeable. It's like being used to driving a high-powered car for donkeys years and then coming down to a motor-bike. I know because I've had some, and a kid of sixteen would make a better fist at driving the motor-bike than I did!"

"I quite see what you mean, sir!" said John diplomatically.

"We're beginning in a small way," continued Mallett. "Twelve officers and about half of them R.N.V.R. I'm on the Chief of Naval Personnel's staff and he asked me if I could recommend any officer to the job. That's why I sent for you; but, of course, it's a case of volunteering. It's a hazardous business—very hazardous—and you needn't accept unless you quite feel like doing so. Like time to think it over? But remember, once you've put your hand to the jolly old plough, there's no turning back."

Again Mallett was not strictly correct in his

42 Operations Successfully Executed

assertion. Officers and men in the Trade had "turned back", through inefficiency or health reasons. In the former case their names were *Mud*, so far as their future career in the Royal Navy was concerned, and it says much for the zeal of the submarine personnel that such instances are very few and far between, even under the stress and strain of more than four years of modern warfare.

"I'm quite willing to volunteer," declared John without hesitation.

"Good for you, Seven Bells! I thought so or I wouldn't have wasted your time—and the Admiralty's—in lugging you up to Town. The S.N.O. at Otherport will be informed that you're detailed for particular service, but even he won't know what that is. You'll be appointed to H.M.S. *Sulphurous* for a torpedo course. Do you know where she's lying?"

"I don't, sir."

Mallett smiled.

"I thought as much. *Sulphurous* isn't a ship but one of many shore establishments, and it's on the shores of Loch Angus, which is in the wilds of Argyll. You'll want to know how to get there."

"He takes everything for granted, and always looks well ahead," thought John, with that loyal admiration a junior invariably retains for his former skipper—provided the latter was efficient.

Aloud he continued: "Yes, sir, it would be an advantage."

"Right! Train from King's Cross to Glasgow. That's simple, but apt to be a bit tedious. Then—

you'd better write this down. Here's a pad. Have you a pen? If not, I suppose I must lend you mine."

It was John's turn to smile. That was one of Mallett's little peculiarities—if peculiarity it could be termed. He remembered his skipper's reluctance to let anyone else use his fountain pen and what happened when in *Meriden* the heavy-fisted Gunner Barr cross-nibbed the only pen the Owner had on board!

"I haven't a pen but I have a pencil," announced Cloche, remembering the one he had picked up from under the seat at Torquay. That was only yesterday afternoon. It seemed ages ago!

He sat down at a corner of the table. Mallett pushed over a signal pad. John poised the pencil and waited.

"From Glasgow you'll take a train to Killin. That's as far as the train will take you. Got that down: Killin?"

John wrote. The pencil wasn't a good one—war-time product, no doubt—and he pressed slightly heavier on the point to make the words more legible.

As he did so he became aware that the pencil was feeling hot—unpleasantly hot!

"From Killin you will telephone to *Sulphurous* for a car. Telephone number—What's up, Seven Bells?"

For John had thrown the pencil into the empty fireplace. Already it was emitting smoke!

"It's burning, sir!"

44 Operations Successfully Executed

"So it seems. Stand clear. Let it burn itself out!"

But it showed no tendency to do so. Instead it burst into a bright bluish flame emitting a heat that could be distinctly felt across the room.

For perhaps fifteen seconds both men watched the minor conflagration.

"Keep back in case the infernal thing touches off!" warned Mallett. "I'll get an extinguisher. There's one in the corridor."

He flung open the door. With the inrush of air the flames mounted. They were licking the underside of the mantelpiece.

He came back armed with the extinguisher, closed the door, and then directed the spray upon the fierce flames.

He used the whole of the contents of the container without any apparent effect upon the fire. The choking fumes from the chemical filled the room.

"Leave that window alone!" gurgled Mallett, as John made to open it. "Lash your handkerchief over your mouth! . . . Don't want to raise an alarm if I can help it!"

Then, under the effect of the oxygen-destroying chemical, and to the fact that the contents of the "pencil" were burning themselves out, the flames flickered and changed in colour to a pale yellow, until with a final puff of smoke the fire was extinguished.

"Now you can open the window!" said Mallett, coughing violently.

A cloud of evil-smelling smoke surged out of the open window. Mallett went to the grate, looked, and then beckoned to John.

The hearth was of glazed tiles, but so fierce had been the heat that not only were several tiles cracked but a cavity quite an inch in depth and about six inches in diameter had been burned out of the supposedly fire-resisting hearth.

There was a knock on the door and a tall, broad-shouldered Commander entered.

"Came to see what's up, Mallett," he exclaimed. "Thought you were having a sort of smoking concert here! Phew! What a stink!"

"Come in and shut that infernal door, old horse!" rejoined Mallett. "We don't want the fumes all over the building or the fire brigade will be breezing in. . . . This is Lieutenant Cloche, who was in two ships with me. . . . Commander McNabb!"

"What's been happening?" inquired the newcomer after the introduction.

"That's what I want to know," replied Mallett. "Perhaps you can enlighten me, Seven Bells. Cloche here is a seventh son, hence his second name Septimus: hence Seven Bells!"

"I see," rejoined McNabb, although he failed to grasp the meaning of the simile because his knowledge of the French language was decidedly weak. "Been experimenting with a new type of smoke-screen?"

John, now painfully conscious of blistered fingertips, began to explain the circumstances under which the pencil had come into his possession.

46 Operations Successfully Executed

The two Commanders listened in silence until he mentioned that the pencil was nine inches in length and had a celluloid cover.

"How do you know it measured nine inches?" asked McNabb.

"Because I could just span it with my little finger and thumb, sir."

"Ah! Well, carry on. Interesting, isn't it, Mallett?"

"The pencil was made in the U.S.A. I remember seeing the maker's name—I can't recollect the actual name—but it also had 'Salem, Mass.' on it."

As he proceeded with his narrative several little incidents to which he had previously attached slight or no importance occurred to him.

"The fellow who dropped the pencil was on the same bus with me between Oldtown Priors and Exeter," he continued. "He alighted at Teignmouth."

"Teignmouth?" echoed Mallett. "That's remarkable. In this morning's précis I saw something about . . . I'd better send for the document."

He touched a bell. A Wren entered. If she had any doubts concerning the atmosphere of the room—for in spite of the windows being open the reek remained—she gave no sign.

"This morning's précis, please!"

"Very good, sir."

"This looks like a case for Scotland Yard," observed Mallett, while they were waiting for the required documents. "You might be able to throw

some important light upon the recent acts of sabotage in the West Country, Seven Bells. Mysterious fires have been reported in various Government establishments, and so far there is no proof as to how they originated. It's a pity we haven't one of these 'pencils' intact."

"There was no explosion?" asked McNabb.

"None, or we mightn't be here," replied Mallett grimly. "It was some form of high-combustion, slow-burning incendiary powerful enough to eat through a metal plate. . . . Ah, here we are."

He took the docket from the Wren and waited until she had gone out.

"Here we are. 'Crew of S.S. *Landsdown* landed at Teignmouth at 0630 to-day. They reported that their ship had hit a mine soon after midnight about eight miles from shore. They had taken to their boats and had effected a safe landing in spite of a heavy swell.'"

"I don't see what that has to do with the suspect Cloche saw on a bus," remarked McNabb.

"Let me continue. 'The mate of the *Landsdown* — the Master went down with the ship — also reported that he'd spoken a small boat with one man in her and he'd given them their bearings from Teignmouth.'"

"A local fisherman, perhaps?"

"Hardly. In-shore fishing is strictly prohibited after sunset. All small craft must be immobilized during the hours of darkness."

"That's so," agreed McNabb. "So what do you deduce from that?"

48 Operations Successfully Executed

"I may be wrong," replied Mallett, "but I fancy the fellow who dropped that 'pencil' at Torquay and afterwards alighted from the bus at Teignmouth was the same as the one in the small boat. If so he was doing a bunk from the country. Quite possibly he had an appointment with a U-boat."

"Then let's hope he missed it," added McNabb.

"I agree," said Mallett. "Well, we'd better keep quiet about this incident so far as the staff is concerned. I'll ring up the Yard and get them to send someone over. Then what about lunch together, Seven Bells?"

CHAPTER V

"Nazi-controlled"

Ober-leutnant Hans Schenk's immediate trouble did not end the moment he was received on board U401.

Kapitan Kemmler told him, without giving him any alternative, that he'd better go below. In spite of the threatening weather he would have preferred to remain on deck, sheltering in the wake of the conning-tower.

Below he felt much in the position of a motorist who invariably drove himself, finding himself in a strange car with another driver. Although nearly

two years had elapsed since he was in command of a U-boat, Schenk was obsessed by the thought that he could handle the craft better than Kemmler and that Kemmler might make a hash of things even during the comparatively short sea passage between the English coast and Cherbourg.

U401 started on the surface on her return journey, but in less than a quarter of an hour she had to do a crash dive, only twenty seconds elapsing between the ringing of the warning bell and her complete submergence.

Even then it was a close shave. Four heavy detonations in quick succession shook her like a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

Several of the electric lamps gave out. Loose gear thrown from shelves and racks clattered on the steel deck. Men held their breath, waiting apprehensively.

An *Unter-leutnant* following the *Kapitan* to the control position stopped on his way through the narrow, cramped wardroom which was actually the living- and sleeping-quarters for four officers, excluding the newly-joined passenger.

"An accursed English flying-boat," he explained. "She spotted us through a gap in the clouds. . . . Doubtless she's turning to deliver another attack."

There was another anxious wait, but no more explosive charges were dropped. Evidently the aircraft was returning from patrol and had used up the last of her depth-charges.

It was not until an hour later that the U-boat

50 Operations Successfully Executed

cautiously showed the tip of her periscope above the surface. Everything seemed clear. Kemmler decided to surface.

The hatch was thrown open. The *Kapitan* and two of the crew ascended the steel ladder and gained the deck. But only for a few moments.

"Motor boat, *Herr Kapitan!*" exclaimed a petty officer in an excited tone. "Over there! She's coming this way!"

Again there was a crash dive and again the U-boat's luck was in. The M.G.B., the first of seven in line ahead, passed within a couple of cables' lengths without spotting the ominous swirl that marked the position where the *Unterseeboot* had disappeared. It wasn't due to any lack of vigilance on the part of the British craft's look-out, but to the blackness of the night. From the U-boat's deck as she lay awash the whale-bone in the teeth of the leading boat of the flotilla had been distinctly visible with no corresponding bow wave to reveal the German submarine's position.

The danger passed, U401 once more came to the surface. Running submerged might be safer, but the speed had been cut down by half. The *Kapitan* was anxious to be well on the other side of the Channel before dawn, because sunrise was a very unhealthy time to be returning to base.

Schenk spent most of the time lying on one of the bunks. He couldn't sleep. His nerves were too much on edge for that.

Just before six a seaman appeared with cups of *ersatz* coffee for the officers.

"Where are we now, do you know?" asked Schenk.

"About twelve kilometres on our port beam is Alderney, *Herr Officier*."

"Alderney? What are we doing here?"

"I do not know, *Herr Officier*."

The *Unter-leutnant* who came into the cabin at that moment supplied the information.

"We've received wireless orders that we proceed to Morlaix. It seems that the enemy aircraft attacked Cherbourg in considerable strength just before midnight, and the *Unterseebooten* pens have received damage. Perhaps it's as well that we were under orders to pick you up, *Herr Ober-leutnant*, otherwise we would have been at Cherbourg. Being depth-charged at sea is all part of the business. One gets used to it, more or less, but to have one of these enormous bombs that the British are now using fall close to where one's craft is moored is a very different matter. Even two metres of concrete over the pens. . . . No, I do not like it!"

It was a bold admission for a junior to make to a superior officer, but Hans Schenk merely grunted in agreement. He'd been in raids during his periodical visits to Britain, but he knew full well that these present-day activities of the *Luftwaffe* were puny in comparison with the mighty and ever-increasing blows dealt by the R.A.F. and the United States Air Force.

Four hours later Schenk was landed at Morlaix. Here he was directed to report to an official holding a position somewhat resembling that of

52 Operations Successfully Executed

a British R.T.O., although with more arbitrary powers.

He was then given a second-class railway ticket to Berlin—second class because he wasn't in uniform—and sent on another stage of his long and tedious journey to the capital of the Third Reich.

Midnight found him no farther than Orleans. Sabotage had been responsible for the blocking of the line. He spent the night in a small hotel, proceeding on his way at eight in the morning.

After that the train seemed to wander over north-eastern France until it stopped for the fiftieth time somewhere in open country.

An official came along the corridor.

"All blinds must be drawn immediately," he ordered. "They are not to be raised until permission is given."

"Is it in order to ask where we are?" asked Schenk.

"Your papers!" snapped the official.

These were produced.

The man, seeing that his questioner was a naval officer though—most unusually—in civilian clothes, thawed slightly.

"Approaching Trier," he announced. "You are for Berlin? Well, Berlin had it badly again last night. Now keep those blinds down!"

There was a respectful chorus of "*Ja, Herr Zugführer*" from the other occupants of the carriage. No one said a word after the official went out. Each was suspicious of his fellow-traveller—a very different state of affairs to those in England, Schenk

decided, where warnings against careless speech were often more honoured in the breach than in the observance!

The train grunted and groaned through Trier to Coblenz, then it did a right-angled turn up the Rhine valley to Mainz, waited there an interminable time, and then crawled on to Frankfurt—or rather to a station on the outskirts. Only when the train was twenty miles beyond Frankfurt were the blinds allowed to be raised. Travellers had not been permitted to see the appalling scenes of utter devastation—scenes that gave the lie direct to Hermann Goering's empty boast that British bombers would never fly over Reich territory!

At length, having skirted two-thirds of Berlin, the train drew up at the Stettiner Station. A grim reminder of the devastation done to the rail communications with the capital.

The platform was crowded. Hans didn't have to ask why. Thousands of dispirited Berliners, hungry and homeless, had been waiting for hours for trains to take them, as they hoped, beyond the range of the Royal Air Force. These were some of the bestial multitudes who, but a short two years ago, had shouted approbation at the top of their voices when their Fuehrer had announced that the *Luftwaffe* would wipe out every important town within the British Isles. How they had applauded his raucous, hysterical voice!

And now, in a single night, more bombs—much heavier ones—had rained down upon Berlin than the *Luftwaffe* had dropped on London—a far

54 Operations Successfully Executed

larger target—during the eight months of sustained activity by the German Air Force.

Although few or no attempts were being made to control and question the throngs of fugitives, every traveller on arrival was being subjected to a strict scrutiny. Many were peremptorily told to leave at the first opportunity—which in most cases took a very long time.

Then came Schenk's turn.

"Where do you propose going?"

"To my house, Rosenstrasse 14, to change into uniform."

The official consulted a list.

"Rosenstrasse no longer exists," he announced.

"To-morrow I report at the Admiralty and at the Foreign Office."

"Useless, *Herr Ober-leutnant!* Both buildings have had to be evacuated. To you, being an officer, I can give you this information: The General-Admiral Doktor Raeder with his staff has removed himself to Grunberg, and the *Reichsamt des Aussern* (Foreign Office) has taken over the castle of Holtz at Guben. I would strongly advise you to proceed at least a part of the way well before sunset, since it is quite possible that those thrice accursed Englishers will be over here to-night."

It was another three hours before Hans was clear of Berlin, and then, in a train to which men, women and children were hanging like clusters of bees, he arrived at a small village some twenty miles from the capital.

He was in a most uncomfortable situation. His

parents' home had been laid flat—what happened to them he knew not, and there seemed slight chance that he would ever know, since the authorities never published anything like a complete list of casualties. He'd lost his one and only uniform. He had money, but for the present it was mere dross. There was neither food nor accommodation to be found in the overcrowded village.

Towards sunset, however, he managed to get a cup of watery soup from an army field kitchen that had been sent to ease the food situation. Then for lack of anything better he found shelter along with some thirty others in a draughty hayloft, lacking the hay that would have at least mitigated the effects of the intense cold.

Just at nine o'clock heavy reverberations shook the air. Most of the shelterers went out into the open. From the high ground they could see flares and the vivid incessant flashes of exploding bombs. The glare of thousands of incendiaries threw a lurid light upon the clouds that hung over Berlin. The city was undergoing another heavy raid, the second on two consecutive nights.

It was all over in thirty minutes. The fugitives returned to their shelter to discuss the fate that had overtaken the capital of the German Reich. Judging by scraps of conversation he overheard, Schenk had his doubts concerning statements he had heard over the radio on the morale of the German civil population. Hunger and destitution had, at least for the present, made them heedless of the fear of the Gestapo.

56 Operations Successfully Executed

Next morning, hungry and unshaven, Schenk resumed his journey, arriving at Grunberg soon after noon. Here he was able to obtain food and hot water. Making himself more presentable, he proceeded to report at the temporary offices of the German Admiralty, but everything was in such a state of chaos, owing to the destruction of the bulk of official documents during the raid, that he was curtly informed that he had better report in a week's time.

From Grunberg he made his way to Holtz Castle and reported, not as *Ober-leutnant* Hans Schenk, but merely as No. 748, his official designation as a Secret Service Agent.

He was asked numerous questions concerning his activities and the information he had picked up during his latest visit to England, and particularly about any preparations relating to the immediate launching of a Second Front.

However much the Nazis scoffed at the idea of a successful landing in Western Europe and in spite of their boasts of the impregnability of the "Western Wall", it was quite certain that the threat kept them in a perpetual state of nervous tension.

Hans knew that within certain limitations he could exaggerate. He had to be careful, for if he reported grossly inaccurate and false information his employers would discover the deception sooner or later. Then, in the vernacular, "he would be for it!"

He declared that at several small ports he had visited there were assemblies of landing-

craft, but that guarded inquiries had failed to obtain for him any information of their destination or whether they were to be used during the winter months.

"Ach! The information we most particularly require it seems impossible to obtain!" exclaimed Schenk's inquisitor. "Now, tell me: how did you dispose of the fire-pencils?"

Hans described his activities with his fire-raising "samples" in detail except for the last one. To the best of his knowledge he had lost it, not under the seat at Torquay but outside the deserted pill-box at Teignmouth.

That would have been a confession of carelessness, and carelessness in the Secret Service, whether German or of any other nation, was an unforgivable sin.

Schenk drew upon his fertile imagination.

"I had no opportunity during my last day's stay in England to place it where I had intended—an equipment store near Plymouth—so I posted it to someone at the British Admiralty whose name I saw in the Navy List."

"Ach! Then if anything *did* happen the report should be in the English newspapers. It is curious that they are not censored in matters relating to sabotage. Perhaps we shall see! Now tell me: you have travelled in the United States. Do you happen to be acquainted with Frankville?"

"I have never heard of the place, *Herr Direktor*."

"So? It is a small seaport in the State of Georgia."

"I have never been so far south. I've been

58 Operations Successfully Executed

mostly in the neighbourhood of New York. I know that city well."

"And so do thousands of good Germans," rejoined the *Direktor* drily. "Let me remind you that it is not a case of where you want to go but rather to where we send you."

"The enemy is undertaking some very important work at Frankville. As far as our information goes, large ferry transport capable of transporting numbers of heavy tanks over immense sea distances are in course of construction there. Unfortunately your predecessor working the district has been prevented from continuing his investigations. Hence it has been decided to send you to carry on from the point where he was compelled to leave off."

The Foreign Office official had refrained from giving his subordinate the full facts of No. 700's failure to supply the much-desired information. No. 700 had been suspicious that he was under observation by the U.S. Federal Authorities, and in consequence he had shaken the dust of Frankville from his feet and had sought, as he hoped, immunity in New Orleans. Actually the American police had no suspicions of him, but his abandonment of duty had brought upon him the vengeance of the Nazis. Under mysterious circumstances, No. 700's body had been found in the yellow waters of the Mississippi.

"So you will proceed to Frankville as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made," continued the *Direktor*. "You will be Oscar G. Harboard, of New York, a traveller in canned goods for the firm

of Nortoft of that city. Do not be surprised if in the course of your new business you are referred to as a 'drummer'. That is purely a Yankee term and has no direct reference to beating a drum as we Germans understand it. Now you will take this sheaf of documents. Study the contents thoroughly but make mental notes only. Present yourself here to-morrow and at the same hour, by which time your American identity papers and other necessary documents will be ready."

"One more thing, *Herr Direktor!*"

"And that?" asked the other coolly.

"I am short of money."

"You always are. Have you been living like an English lord? . . . Here you are, an order of a thousand reich marks. You can cash it in Room 13. Good day!"

Conscious that he was not in uniform, Schenk bowed from the waist and backed out of the *Direktor's* presence.

Hans took a room at a small inn and spent most of the rest of the day studying the numerous documents relating to the Frankville case.

He wasn't feeling at all happy about it. Espionage in Britain wasn't easy; in the States it would be more difficult. He knew perfectly well that as an officer in the German submarine service he was practically finished. His technical knowledge would certainly be useful, but once that period of usefulness was past his employers would throw him over without the slightest compunction. They would betray him by the simple expedient of posting

60 Operations Successfully Executed

German bank-notes to him at a fictitious address in Frankville. 'The American Dead Letter Office and the Federal police would do the rest!

Next day he again reported.

The *Direktor* was affability itself.

"My dear Schenk!" he exclaimed. "Let me congratulate you! That last 'fire pencil' of yours! Listen to this extract from an English newspaper received to-day: 'A mysterious fire occurred in a mail van' of the Plymouth-Paddington express last night. First attempts to extinguish the flames proving fruitless, the mail van was uncoupled at a siding near Savernake. Some of the mail bags were rescued but the van and the bulk of its contents were completely destroyed. Investigations as to the probable cause of the fire are proceeding.' So that shows how excellently you have performed your good work for the Fatherland."

Hans bowed.

"To work for the Fatherland is my ardent wish, *Herr Direktor*," he replied, although he knew perfectly well that the "pencil" he had lost couldn't have been planted in the midnight mail train. All the same, there was no harm in taking the credit for the deed.

"And now those documents I gave you to study. . . . Thank you! All here?"

The *Direktor* turned over the pages to assure himself that the numbers were in their complete and right sequence.

"Here are your papers. They are absolutely proof against detection, so should anything happen

to go wrong with you, you cannot lay the blame to that branch of my department specializing in counterfeit passports and similar papers. Money in American five- and ten-dollar bills. That should be more than necessary for covering your expenses while over there. The balance of your salary will, of course, be credited to you for release after the war. And here's your route. You start to-day from Bordeaux."

"But I have to report at the Admiralty on Tuesday, *Herr Direktor*."

"You will do nothing of the kind," snapped the *Direktor*. "It is imperative you arrive at Frankville at the earliest possible moment. These Americans: we know only too well how rapidly they are turning out ships. It will be worse than useless to arrive at your destination only to find that the mysterious ships being constructed there have been launched, fitted out and taken somewhere else! Now remember: good results or——"

He left the threat unfinished. A shudder ran through Hans Schenk's frame. He could not help visualizing a headman's block and a top-hatted man in evening dress and wearing white gloves standing beside it.

CHAPTER VI

Under Training

A drab-coloured motor bus driven by a naval rating deposited Lieutenant John Septimus Cloche, together with eleven other blithe young officers, at the well-guarded entrance to the shore establishment officially known as H.M.S. *Sulphurous*.

Within the space of six months the vicinity of the isolated Loch Angus—that till now had hardly altered in appearance since the days of the painted Picts—had undergone a drastic change.

The only stretch of slightly undulating ground at the head of the loch had been levelled and drained. Gaunt trees had been ruthlessly uprooted and in their stead brick buildings of a more or less permanent character had been erected to accommodate the staff and those under instruction, together with the necessary stores, equipment and limited personal belongings.

On the crest of the high ground surrounding the loch, which, being roughly pear-shaped, was five miles in length and two across its widest part, ran a high fence of “unclimbable” steel. At least that was its official designation—unclimbable—according to Works’ Department specifications, although an active man, with the assistance of a door-mat, would be able to scale it with comparative ease. Consequently a report had been circulated that the fence

contained an electrically charged wire of high voltage, although this was a figment of the imagination. Actually the fence was regularly patrolled and, except under the cover of darkness, no unauthorized person could approach within four hundred yards of it without being spotted.

A petty officer—the baggage master—appeared with a working party.

"We'll strike your gear down to the mess-deck, sirs!" he announced. "You'll be reporting for duty at the ship's office."

"Any cinema in this show?" asked a lieutenant already known to John Cloche in the course of the bus journey from the train junction as Shorty Frazer.

"Thirty miles as the crow flies and fifty by road is the nearest," replied another of the newly arrived batch.

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted the petty officer. "But we've got our own movie show. It's mostly educational stuff, I admit, but some of the films ain't that bad! Now, gentlemen, the ship's office is over there, first door on your right."

The "officers taking special course" filed in. One by one they were summoned into an inner room, where a couple of grey-haired Commanders took each officer's particulars, paying special attention to his identity card and form of appointment.

"Your cabin is No. 21, Mr. Cloche," announced one of the two officers at the termination of the interview. "You have the rest of the day in which to sling your hammock. Make yourself acquainted

64 Operations Successfully Executed

with the notices on the routine board and they will give you the hang of things, more or less!"

"Slinging his hammock" John knew to be a figure of naval speech. His cabin was provided with a bedstead and other furniture, so that it served a dual purpose—for sleep and for his spare waking moments if he wanted to be by himself.

Having "shaken down", he made his way to the spacious ward-room whither most of the new arrivals had already drifted. Otherwise it was deserted, since classes took up most of the hours of daylight except for the customary breaks for meals.

Next morning work for John and his "batch" commenced early and in earnest.

At six bells in the Morning Watch they were aroused. Then in flannels and sweaters they doubled round the parade ground—known as the quarter-deck—before cold baths and breakfast.

Then lectures on torpedoes. Almost all of the newly joined officers had had practical experience with this type of naval weapon, not in practice or theory but in the real thing. Most of them wore ribbons. There were four D.S.O.s—a decoration that wasn't picked up but which had to be well and truly earned for service actually against the enemy. Two sub-lieutenants sported the ribbon of the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal, so it went without saying that they had served with distinction on the Lower Deck before being given commissions.

In spite of their previous and specialized knowledge of the torpedo, John and his companions quickly discovered that they had more or less to

start at scratch. Amongst other things they discovered that the weapons were of the 24-inch type, powerful enough, provided they hit where they were intended, to sink the heaviest battleship afloat. They were bidden to take down in their notebooks details of the speed, range, capacity of the "war head" and other data, all of which had to be subsequently memorized since their written notes would have to be destroyed at the end of the course.

Then in theory they were shown the torpedo-tubes.

"Most of you know how a 'mouldie' is launched home," explained the instructor. "You know how many hands are required for that job. You can forget it! That job will be done for you. You can't expect to manhandle a couple of 24-inch torpedoes in a craft some 40 feet overall and with an extreme beam of 12 feet."

After lunch came practical work. The class was split up into groups of three, each under its own instructor. Then they were taken down to the shore of the loch, on the edge of which were four vertical shafts each with a steel ladder. Between each shaft and the water's edge—the depth being six fathoms—was a closed trap-hatch, the meaning of which would be explained later on in the proceedings.

"Now down 'ere," began the P.O. instructor to John's party, speaking in a sepulchral voice like that of a marine in Nelson's *Victory* indicating the exact spot where that great hero fell, "is a reproduction of sorts of the pocket submarine which you'll be commanding some day, if you're lucky. It's fixed

66 Operations Successfully Executed

on a periscope depth—the periscope's down—and there are both mouldies in the tubes. They're lowered through that hatch you see there. Now we'll go below. Mind your 'eads, please, sirs! This ain't exactly the Albert 'All!"

He depressed a switch and the black cavernous depths were flooded with light. The P.O. descended first, followed by John with Frazer after him, and finally the last member of the party, Jimmy Acaster, who, for some obscure reason, answered to the nickname of Melba, until it was explained that he hailed from a Yorkshire village which in addition to bearing the same name had "Melbis" tacked on to it. Hence it had been partly understandable how his former messmates had cut down the Melbis to Melba!

At the foot of the concrete-lined shaft John found he was in a steel, cigar-shaped compartment with barely sufficient headroom for him to stand erect. Down the centre ran a metal gangway; on either side of it were objects that John knew to be the torpedo tubes peculiar to the recently designed and constructed pocket submarines.

The conning-tower, instead of being a separate watertight bulkheaded structure, projected only about three feet above the cambered hull. In it was the lower part of the periscope together with a relatively few wheels, levers and other instruments.

The instructor named the various gadgets and explained their nature.

"Most of 'em down here are duds," he continued. "You turn that wheel and nothin' happens.

In a proper submarine of this type you'd be filling the main ballast tank. Now there are no air bottles in these hookers. You get what air pressure you want by working this pump, and this one you'll have to use when you have to eject water ballast."

"That will be hard work, I expect?" asked Acaster.

"'Ard work? Not arf, sir, although the pump's on the hydraulic ram principle. Of course, as you know, the pressure varies with the depth."

"How deep can these submarines dive?" inquired Shorty Frazer.

"Fifteen fathoms, sir. Below that I wouldn't advise you to go," he added, with grim relish. "What happens to you if you do depends on how you were brought up!"

From which his listeners gathered that there was a depth limit beyond which it was positively indiscreet to dive. Unable to resist enormous pressure as in the case of the normal type, the pocket edition's hull would collapse. There could be no escape for the crew.

A telephone bell rang.

The petty officer picked up the receiver.

"'Oo?" he inquired. "Slapping it about mighty smart, aren't you? Orl right, carry on."

He replaced the instrument.

"Number Three's reported she's going to fire," he announced. "Trying to walk afore you can crawl, I reckon. Now, sirs, gather round and I'll switch the light off."

He did so. The interior was plunged into dark-

68 Operations Successfully Executed

ness except for a patch of natural light on the inverted truncated cone-shaped periscope object bowl.

All three pupils could watch the bowl with its vertical and horizontal graduations simultaneously. The periscope had previously been raised. All that could be seen of the loch was an expanse of ruffled waters and the distant high ground.

"Watch out for the target," continued the petty officer. "It's eight hundred feet long—about the same as the old *Turps' Shop*, and calculate the range. Stand by and don't all shout at once please, sirs!"

Into the field of vision appeared an oblong shape moving slowly in the wake of a small but powerful motor tug.

This was the target: a long narrow hull supporting a lattice-work of light spars covered with dark-green canvas. Although this superstructure had no actual relationship with that of Germany's crack battleships, the length was what mattered. The speed at which the target was being towed evidently didn't signify.

John wondered why. In destroyers allowance had to be made for deflection—the speed of one's craft and that of the enemy, the range and the probable position of the hostile craft at the moment of impact of the torpedo, had all to be taken into account. In this instance all that seemed to matter was the range.

The target—or rather its virtual image—moved slowly out of the field of vision—since the periscope of the "trainer" could not be revolved.

"No. 4's missed with both," announced the instructor. "They would have hoisted a red and white flag on the target for each hit. Well, sir, and what do you reckon the range to have been?"

"Four thousand yards," replied John.

"And you, sir?"

"The same, I think," answered Shortie.

"I'd say it was nearer five thousand," declared "Melba" Acaster.

"Wrong, gentlemen! You're all wrong!" exclaimed the petty officer. "I gave you a tip from the horse's mouth in a manner of speaking. Eight hundred feet didn't I say? Well, you get your object between those two lines which represent eight hundred feet. You note what circle it's on, and there you are—three thousand five hundred yards. Calculations on the spot and no figuring so to speak. Have you got me?"

His audience assured him that they had.

"But ought not the speed of the target to be taken into account?" asked Frazer.

It was the question John was on the point of making.

"No," was the astonishing reply. "When it comes to the real thing you won't have to worry about moving targets, although you'll have to keep your eyes skinned for enemy destroyers and such like. Your targets are Hitler's big ships. If they did come out it would be up to our big submarines to have first crack at 'em. But they don't look like it. They skulk in narrow Norwegian fiords, so they've just got to be winkled out. The odds are a thousand

70 Operations Successfully Executed

to one they'll be at anchor, so that's why you don't have to worry about speed and deflection."

The next fortnight passed quietly enough. There were practical demonstrations alternating with lectures and physical-training instruction, all three being compulsory. The staff of H.M.S. *Sulphurous* avoided the mistakes so frequently made at schools of instruction run by all three services. No two lectures were given consecutively. There was invariably an interval of some sort, so that those under instruction could mentally digest one subject before tackling the next one.

Steadily—one might say rapidly—the intensive course proceeded, and presently John found himself one of a crew of three detailed to man one of the midget submarines. Two of these—of an experimental type—had been transported to the loch for training purposes, and only in a few instances did they differ from those now under construction that were intended for service against the enemy.

Loch Angus was ideal for this phase of training. Nowhere was it more than thirteen fathoms deep, so that there was no risk of diving out of control to such a depth that the comparatively light-built hull would collapse under exterior water pressure.

As before, Frazer and Acaster were John's co-trainees. Each had been given instructions how to run the electric motor that drove the single propeller. Internal-combustion engines found no place in this type of craft, whose range of action would be limited to one hundred and sixty miles—enough to leave the parent ship, penetrate the longest Norwegian

flord that could give shelter to a German battleship, and to return, provided the operation were successful.

If it weren't, there was very little chance of a safe return.

According to orders, John was at the diving and course controls, Shorty was responsible for the running of the engines, and "Melba" was a sort of understudy to both. In addition he had to attend to the water-ballast tank.

With mixed feelings of trepidation lest he should make a mess-up of things and grim determination to get on with it, John followed his two companions into the interior of the submarine.

The motor was switched on, and the little craft nosed her way out of the basin to the open waters of the loch.

After half an hour's cruising on the surface came the muffled voice of the instructor speaking from the shore by means of radio telephony:

"Dive to periscope depth. . . . Dive to periscope depth. . . . Over to you."

"Orders received, sir," replied John, "descending to periscope depth!"

The watertight hatch was closed and secured. The three men in a hermetically sealed metal shell were cut off from the outside world except through the medium of the radio telephone.

It was a strange sensation, but John derived some satisfaction from knowing that if anything did go wrong, apart from the boat being flooded, salvage craft could locate and raise her from the bottom of

72 Operations Successfully Executed

the loch in less than an hour, since her position was marked by a float attached to her hull by a wire longer than the maximum depth in which the submarine was operating.

Then orders came through to descend to six fathoms, which meant that the tip of the periscope would no longer be above the surface and that the submarine would be running "blind".

A succession of gurgles, the noise greatly magnified within the hull, announced that *Acaster* was filling the ballast tanks sufficiently to give the little craft "neutral buoyancy".

In practice there was no such thing. An object immersed in water either comes to the surface or sinks to the bottom; but in the case of a submarine it can be made to keep submerged at a given depth by the action of its hydroplanes or horizontal rudders.

Gingerly John pulled back the lever actuating the diving gear. At least he thought he did, but before he realized the fact the depth-gauge indicated that the submarine was sixty feet down and had but another thirty to go before she hit the bottom of the loch!

In a hurried effort to avoid that undignified procedure—although it entailed little or no risk either to the craft or to her crew—he wrenched the lever in the opposite direction.

With the hydroplanes elevated to their maximum angle the submarine shot to the surface, only the fact that she was in diving trim preventing her from imitating the gambols of a porpoise!

"What do you think you're doing?" inquired the voice on the telephone. "This isn't the Grand National! Have another cut at it and meet her before she's down to the required depth—like you'd do at the wheel of a surface craft. . . . And watch your course! It's much too early for lunch!"

Glancing at the faintly illumined compass card, John discovered that there had been good cause for the instructing officer's blistering comments. John had been so intent upon the diving part that he had let the helm more or less take care of itself, with the result that the submarine had made a sixteen-point turn and was now heading back to her mooring berth.

Bringing his craft back on her proper course, John had another shot at keeping her at the desired depth. This time, handling the controls very gently, he succeeded sufficiently to merit a gruffly spoken approbation from his unseen mentor.

Several mornings were occupied in diving tactics before the crew were given instructions to "run torpedoes", attacking the target from a distance of three thousand yards.

The two torpedoes, each fitted with copper practice heads, were lowered into position through the hatchway by the maintenance party before the submarine cast off.

On this occasion Shorty Frazer was nominally in command, with John in charge of the propelling machinery.

Cautiously approaching the target, Shorty exposed the tip of the periscope for a few seconds at intervals,

74 Operations Successfully Executed

working out the distance of the "enemy" craft by means of the graduated scale.

Then John heard a loud hiss. The submarine gave a perceptible shudder as the first of the 24-inch "mouldies" left its tube.

It was no use straining his ears to hear the muffled *boom* that in actual warfare announces to the submarine's crew that the result was a hit. The missile had run its course and was floating on the surface a good mile beyond the target; but it yet remained to be seen whether Shorty had scored a success.

Bringing the craft up to periscope depth, he peered into the object bowl.

"Done it, Seven Bells!" he shouted. "They've hoisted the 'affirmative'."

Sure enough a red flag with a white St. George's cross had been displayed from the target, the signal that the torpedo had scored a hit.

"Good effort!" rejoined John. "If that had been the *Tirpitz* we'd be drawing blood-money. As it is, which will you have: a coco-nut or a fat cigar?"

"What *is* a coco-nut?" asked Frazer. "I've almost forgotten. The last time I remember seeing one was on the east coast of Africa when we slung the Italians out of Somaliland. Lived on 'em more or less for a fortnight on the Juba river. . . . No, I think I'll prefer a cigar, if it isn't one of those beastly *pfennig* ones you could buy in Hamburg before this 'do' started!"

A few days later a party of officers under instruction was sent to board the target craft to observe

the torpedoing from a different viewpoint from the one to which they had been accustomed.

John found himself on a long, narrow wooden float on which were a number of light spars each hinged to the deck and capable of being lowered by the release of a tackle. Canvas spread aloft represented the above-water hull of a battleship, while underneath the float more canvas had been lowered to a depth equal to that of Germany's largest battleship. A torpedo scoring a hit would penetrate the fabric and show the actual point of contact.

The moment of attack was unknown. Only the information that a torpedo was to be discharged had been given. It remained with those on the floating target to spot when the missile was on its way.

Gazing at the stretch of sun-flecked water, John realized that under certain conditions the advantage lay with the attacking submarine. Even when she momentarily exposed the tip of her periscope it would be almost if not quite impossible to discern it against the light.

Suddenly someone shouted: "It's coming!"

Sure enough the plume-like wake of the weapon, set to run at twenty feet, could be seen breaking surface.

"Look out everybody, for heaven's sake!" bawled a petty officer. "She's not running true."

The torpedo had broken surface and was leaping in and out of the water, very much like a flat pebble making "ducks and drakes". It might hit anywhere along the eight-hundred-foot target. It might pass harmlessly underneath the target or jump over

76 Operations Successfully Executed

it with fatal results to anyone unfortunate enough to be in its way.

Most of the officers and ratings threw themselves flat. Several of them had seen a "live" tinfish speeding towards them. That was war and a risk that they had to run, but to be bowled over by a practice torpedo wasn't quite the same thing. A few remained standing, watching the rapidly approaching erratic weapon and hoping for the best.

John compromised: he neither stood where he was nor took up a prone position. He stooped, ready to move to the right or left in an attempt to avoid the on-coming peril.

It seemed to be heading straight for the spot where he stood.

It dived, but only for a few seconds. Then, leaping right out of the water, it skimmed the deck of the raft so close to where John stood that he felt the windage and the slipstream from the torpedo's rapidly spinning propellers.

Instinctively, though the peril was passed, he side-stepped only to stumble over Shorty's recumbent form.

"Confound it!" shouted Frazer. "When you've finished, Seven Bells, kindly remove the toe of your boot from my ear!"

"Sorry!" rejoined John, picking himself up.

Meanwhile the torpedo, striking the water some twenty feet beyond the target, had dived almost vertically to the bottom of the loch, to embed its nose in the mud while its still revolving propeller created a miniature maelstrom on the surface.

Misfortunes, it has been said, never come singly.

Before the party on the raft could realize what had happened, a sudden squall had swept down from the mountains across the hitherto placid surface of the loch.

Too late a couple of men attempted to cast loose the tackle supporting the trellis top-hamper. Caught fairly on the beam, the spread of canvas and the spars to which it was attached collapsed like a pack of cards. Men were bowled over like ninepins, some falling overboard, others struggling under the canvas that draped the deck.

The while the wind howled. It sounded very much as if a Boche aircraft was diving to the attack.

Then the squall died away almost as quickly as it had arisen. Those of the victims who had been tumbled overboard—all of whom had regained the raft—were taken ashore to shift into dry clothing, while the others, officers and men, set to work to clean up the raffle of wood and canvas and to grapple for the errant torpedo.

In due time the course of instruction was completed. It marked the passing of another milestone in the long journey to final Victory.

Cloche and Frazer received orders to proceed on special duties to Frankville, U.S.A.

78 Operations Successfully Executed

CHAPTER VII

Escort Duties

"Where's that? Why are we being sent there?" asked Shorty Frazer, pausing in his task of packing his meagre belongings.

"Goodness knows," replied John. "And I'm not questioning the ways of Providence and of the Admiralty. All I hope is that Frankville is somewhere in the Southern States and not in New England. I prefer a warm climate at this time of year."

"We'll soon settle that point," continued Frazer. "I'll send for an atlas. I hope there's one in the ship's library."

There was. From it they learned that Frankville was in Georgia and fairly close to the wealthy New Yorkers' winter resort of Florida.

"We'll know soon enough why we're being sent there," declared John.

Just then a messenger knocked on the door.

"Captain wishes to see Lieutenant Cloche and Lieutenant Frazer, please, gentlemen!"

They found the captain of H.M.S. *Sulphurous* alone in his office. Usually his secretary, a paymaster-lieutenant, and two Wrens were working there. Was it quite by chance they were absent?

"You two officers are detailed for special service,"

he began without any preliminaries. "You already know that you're under orders to proceed to the U.S.A. All I can tell you is that you are to take part in experimental work connected with two vessels under construction at Frankville and then to bring them to a British port so far unspecified. In due course you will know what connexion there is between your new duties and the instruction that you have just completed and which, I have no hesitation in saying, has been most satisfactorily performed."

"Thank you, sir!" said Shorty.

"Nothing to thank me for," continued the "Owner". "It was up to each of you to qualify and you have done so with distinction. . . . Now here are your written instructions and other necessary documents. You will proceed in the destroyer *Tireless*, joining her at Liverpool before noon on Thursday next. Sooner or later we trust," he continued significantly, "you will be landed at Halifax, from where you will go south by rail to your destination. It's going to be some hustle, as our American friends say, but they are noted for that. The whole business requires both secrecy and dispatch. Important issues depend upon it."

After more instructions and having answered various questions, the captain wished them *au revoir* and good luck.

Although this valedication was in formal terms he meant it!

Well on time and well equipped to cope with wintry conditions across the North Atlantic, John

80 Operations Successfully Executed

and his brother-officer reported on board the *Tireless*, a veteran destroyer that certainly had not belied her name.

Then they discovered that she was one of half a dozen naval craft engaged on convoy escort duties, so that their hopes in making a speedy crossing were ill-founded.

"Dashed if I know why you weren't given a passage in one of the convoy," declared the lieutenant-commander. "You'd have been a jolly sight more comfortable."

John, with the experience of a winter in a destroyer based on Iceland, smiled. Frazer, too, had made two runs to Archangel, which demanded a high standard of physical endurance.

"We're not worrying about that," declared the former.

"Just as you like," rejoined their new and temporary skipper drily. "You'll have to squeeze in, I'm afraid. Otherwise, touch wood! it will be a fairly uneventful run. We've made five in succession and never so much as seen a U-boat. Not like it used to be up to eighteen months ago."

Beyond the Mersey Bar, the escorting destroyers, sloops and corvettes picked up the convoy, some sixty deeply laden ships bound for American and Canadian ports. Contrary to popular belief that convoys cross the Atlantic from west to east well down to Plimsol mark and make the voyage in the reverse direction with little if any cargo, Britain had been sending huge consignments to the U.S.A. "Lend-Lease" most certainly wasn't a one-sided

transaction, but a reciprocal one with both nations freely pooling their resources.

Even although the U-boat menace had subsided so far as the North Atlantic sea routes were concerned, precautions for the safety of the convoy were in no measure relaxed.

Aircraft from British bases escorted the ships for the first stage of the journey; Canadian aircraft would be waiting for them far out from the other side, while from a couple of merchant ships converted to aircraft carriers more continually kept guard over the convoy. On the escort ships guns were ready for instant action, as were the defensive armaments of the merchant craft, ready to give Fritz a particularly hot reception should he dare attempt an attack.

And, contrary to the captain of *Tireless's* expectations, he did!

It was at dawn on the third day out. John and Shorty were asleep in their bunks when the alarm was given.

Like everyone else on board, during their sleeping hours, they had "turned in all standing". It was the rule rather than the exception for escort vessels' crews to be a fortnight or three weeks without taking off their clothes while in the danger zone.

They had their action stations but only in a complimentary sense. They were not called upon to take an active part either in defence or attack and their position as passengers left them much in the rôle of onlookers. Consequently they stood a fair chance of seeing most of the game.

82 Operations Successfully Executed

As John and his companion gained the deck the destroyer was heeling outwards under full starboard wheel. Holding on grimly to prevent their feet slithering on the wet deck, they fought their way to their action station.

The for'ard quickfirers were swinging as the destroyer continued to alter course, their muzzles pointing somewhere in the direction where the attacking U-boat was supposed to be. Right aft the security chains of the depth-charges had been cast loose and the fuses set ready to detonate these powerful and sinister devices to the discomfiture and confusion of the enemy.

"Couple o' mouldies just missed us, sir!" announced a signalman.

"A miss is as good as a mile," quoted Shorty.

"Sooner make it a mile, sir," was the grim rejoinder. "'Twere a close call for all that!"

The *Tireless*, even at cruising speed, would be doing two to three miles to the convoy's one. She was quite three miles on the beam of the far-flung line of merchant ships when the attack was first delivered. Evidently the U-boat commander had risked a long shot at the destroyer rather than close with the convoy and thus place himself inside the escort screen.

Suddenly a huge cloud of smoke and water arose in *Tireless's* foaming wake, followed almost at once by a deafening roar. The first of her depth-charges had gone off—the first of a pattern calculated either to destroy the U-boat while submerged or else to force her to the surface. In the latter event she

would be satisfactorily accounted for either by ramming or by gunfire. The former method was less to be recommended and in general was employed only when the crippled victim broke surface close to the destroyer's bows. Although the *Tireless's* knife-like stem could drive completely through the U-boat's hull, there remained the risk of the attacker's bows being twisted by the impact and her propeller blades stripped through fouling the debris. A destroyer in a leaking condition and not able to make way through the water would be of no use in combating the U-boat menace; on the contrary, she would be a hindrance to her consorts.

More depth-charges went down. The explosions shook the *Tireless* from truck to keel. Anxious moments passed without any sign of the enemy being forced to the surface.

"We've missed her!" declared Frazer.

Suddenly the destroyer made a fifteen-point turn and dashed off at full speed away from the ships she was protecting.

An aircraft sent up only a few minutes earlier had reported seven U-boats proceeding on the surface towards the convoy. She was attacking with bombs and cannon-fire. According to the wirelesslyed position, the pack was fifteen miles to the south'ard of the convoy.

Two corvettes were also proceeding to the attack.

Twenty minutes later the *Tireless* came upon the scene of action. The seven *Unterseebooten* had remained on the surface keeping up a hot fire on

84 Operations Successfully Executed

the aircraft. Their concerted hail of shells had seriously damaged the attacker. With her guns disabled and her wings and fuselage ripped by splinters and with one engine out of action, she was limping back in an effort to make a landing on the deck of the carrier.

The arrival of the destroyer and the two corvettes completely changed the situation. The U-boats promptly dived, but not before one had received a hit on the base of her conning-tower at a range of four thousand yards, while the attackers, slung out at intervals of two cables' lengths, prepared to depth-charge their quarry.

It wasn't an enviable position for the Huns. The seven U-boats were seen to be in formation before they submerged. They were in danger of colliding with one another, since they were blind to their surroundings, and in addition they were soon to be shaken like peas in a pod by the heavy depth-charges.

Suddenly one reappeared only two hundred yards on the destroyer's port bow. Whether it was the one previously hit could not be determined.

The *Tireless's* fo'c'sle quick-firers immediately went into action. The doomed U-boat was hidden by columns of spray hurled high in the air by the bursting projectiles, until for the second time she disappeared with her bows sticking up almost vertically.

As the destroyer passed by the spot where she had gone down the turmoil on the surface had subsided. Only a steadily increasing pool of oil, a

grating and a seaman's cap marked her ocean grave.

Then down went the depth-charges, again without apparent result. But as *Tireless* turned to lay another "pattern" two U-boats surfaced almost simultaneously. From the one nearest the destroyer members of the crew appeared, holding up their hands in token of surrender, and only just in time did the British craft withhold her fire. Then, as she began to settle in a turmoil of smoke and spray, her crew took to the icy water, swimming away from her to avoid being taken down by the suction.

The other U-boat's crew made an effort to man their guns, only to be swept away by the withering fire from one of the corvettes.

The last John saw of her was her bows sticking up out of the water like an outsize rifle-bullet. Then his attention swung back to the Germans struggling in the sea.

Handling his craft like a picket-boat, the captain of the destroyer made for the group of survivors. He hadn't any time to waste; in fact he was risking his command by stopping her in the known presence of enemy submarines.

Governed by the dictates of humanity—for, once defeated, the U-boat's survivors were seamen in distress—he took the risk.

Already shell-fire and the icy cold water had taken their toll of the Nazi crew. As the *Tireless*, with hardly any way on, glided into the patch of oily water, ropes were thrown to the swimmers. Some lacked strength to hold on, relaxing their

86 Operations Successfully Executed

grip on the ropes before the British bluejackets could grasp and haul them into safety.

In all, thirteen exhausted survivors were taken on board; then, satisfying himself that all who could be rescued were aboard, the *Tireless's* skipper rang for *full ahead both* and the patrol was resumed.

It had been a brief and brilliant action, resulting in the destruction of three Nazi submarines. More, the speed and determination with which the escort ships had gone into the attack had deterred the rest of the pack. Unharméd the convoy steamed on its way.

That was the last John saw or heard of enemy activity on that run. There had been an alarm when the convoy was off the Newfoundland Banks.

It was night, but quickly a pair of Royal Canadian aircraft were on the scene. Their Leigh lights—parachute flares specially designed to illuminate a wide area—revealed the “enemy”, a couple of seals on an ice floe!

“I say, old man!” remarked Shorty, at the termination of the sea voyage. “I don’t know how it strikes you——”

He hesitated.

“Strikes me?” prompted John.

“Sending us across in a destroyer and watching her down a U-boat. Before long we’ll be submarining and we’ll be the hunted.”

“Exactly,” agreed John. “And what it amounts to is this—if you make one mistake, and you mightn’t have the chance of making another, you have to pay for it. So keep your weather eye lifting!”

CHAPTER VIII

Frankville

Notwithstanding the fact that John and his fellow-traveller had landed straight from a British destroyer, the authorities at Halifax were evidently determined to run no risks by admitting undesirables—and these included spies—to Dominion soil.

After being interviewed and showing their identity papers they were taken by motor sleigh to the station, where they boarded a train for New York.

It was an interesting run. For more than a hundred miles the "rail" ran tortuously through well-wooded, snow-covered country.

Then, quite casually, another traveller remarked to the two British naval officers that he guessed they were now in U.S.A.

And so it was!

From the Atlantic to the Pacific the boundary, partly defined by nature, partly artificial and fixed by the aid of surveyors, stretches for thousands of miles. Men of good-will can freely cross without let or hindrance to or from Britain's oldest Dominion and the Greatest Republic on Earth.

And in this case the train had crossed the frontier without—so far as John could see—any outward and visible sign that he was in the north-eastern state under the Star-spangled Banner.

As the day wore on John and Shorty were in-

88 Operations Successfully Executed

trigued by the names of the stations—or depots as they are called in the States.

There were Yarmouth, Falmouth, Portland, Biddeford (a slight variation in spelling from that of its Devon forebear), Portsmouth, Salisbury, Ipswich, Lynn and Boston; the names of good old English towns from which some of the inhabitants had ventured across the Atlantic to found New England in what was then the Red Indian-infested wilds of North America.

"A bit confusing, what?" remarked Frazer. "Falmouth sandwiched between Yarmouth and Portland."

"Wal, I guess this is a free country," rejoined their travelling companion. "Folk just started their little burgs where they wanted and they just grew."

"Yes, and in some cases larger than their namesakes!" added John. "Boston, for example."

"Bawston!" amended the American.

"Not our Boston in Lincolnshire," declared John, smiling.

"Wal, it's Bawston. I was raised there so I guess I know! Say, what's the Bawston of yours like? I guess I'll be paying a visit to England after the war and see for myself."

He was typically American, inclined to be self-assertive but hospitable. He insisted on Cloche and Frazer being his guests at dinner.

This was served in a long, decidedly overheated dining-saloon. There was no lack of food in bewildering varieties. John hadn't seen such a spread,

much less tasted it, since September, 1939, and even before then he rather doubted whether he had partaken of such a choice of viands. Both Shorty and he drew the line at iced drinks, however, although the American certainly did not.

Vaguely John wondered whether the American stomach was acclimatized to this sort of thing or whether drinking iced waters contributed to the generally prevailing dyspepsia in the U.S.A.!

It was close on ten o'clock when the train pulled up in New York Central Station.

Inquiring for an hotel, John and his chum were directed to one just off Broadway.

"Broadway" sounded rather ominous as regards their finances. They had been well supplied by a paternal Admiralty, but there were limits!

Engaging an "auto", they were driven to the address supplied. It was a comparatively short distance, but it was an experience!

For four years they had been used to black-outs ashore and afloat. They were equally adept in finding their way on foot at night in dockside towns or navigating anything ranging from a destroyer to a picket-boat in pitch darkness. Now the blinding glare of light seemed unreal.

It was quite evident that the New Yorkers didn't expect a visit from the *Luftwaffe* in the immediate future.

Early next morning, lighter in purse and in spirits, John and his chum set out on the final railroad stage of their journey.

In the vast Pennsylvania station they boarded

90 Operations Successfully Executed

the Tampa Express that was to take them without a change to within thirty miles of Frankville.

A negro conductor examined their tickets and, without so much as "by your leave", stuck them in their respective cap-bands! It looked incongruous—a piece of paper adjoining the "Foul Anchor" naval badge of their headgear, but as other passengers were being similarly treated, John and Shorty accepted it on the principle "When in America do as the Americans do"—at least so far as lay in their power.

Swiftly the character of the country changed. The snow had given place to milder weather before they had reached New York. Now they were passing through sub-tropical country supporting a considerable negro population. The "whites", too, differed considerably from the least hard-bitten New Englanders. They were stockier, their faces tanned to a brick-red and not infrequently to an olivine complexion. They were for the most part descendants of the Confederates who in the sixties of the last century had fought a hard bitter struggle with the Federals of the North. Now, from Maine to Texas and from the Carolinas westward to California, Americans, irrespective of colour, were united in a firm resolve to smash completely the Japanese Empire (that appeared to be the first plank in the war programme) and to crush once and for all time the menace of Nazi-ism.

A night in the train when the Pullman was converted into a sleeper brought John and Frazer to the station where they had to change for their

destination, and an hour later—ten o'clock—they found themselves at the depot of Frankville.

Descending to the platform—which in the States is on ground level—the chums waited for the baggage man, another negro, to hand them down their gear.

There were a considerable number of people alighting. Most of them were Southern business men in tussore silk suits and big-brimmed hats. There was a sprinkling of American sailors, obviously returning from leave, a couple of British bluejackets (a pleasing sight this!), some negro workmen, and a thick-set man wearing a white suit and carrying a case which in American parlance is termed a grip.

"Say, Massa Harboard, you're lookin' fo' Massa Dixon?" inquired a negro porter.

"Sure," replied the man in a New England accent.

"I guess you'll be dis'pinted," was the rejoinder. "He's gone out of town. Reckon he won't be in before Monday."

The man addressed as Harboard muttered an imprecation. As he did so John caught his eye.

"I've seen that fellow before," he thought.

The arrival of the luggage put further thoughts out of his head. After all, if he had come across Harboard before—and he had no recollection of anyone of that name—it didn't matter. He'd seen literally thousands of faces since he crossed the Atlantic.

"Where you to, boss?" asked the porter.

92 Operations Successfully Executed

"Three Palms Hotel," replied John, giving the name supplied in his itinerary.

"Sure; I'll hire an auto," declared the negro, accepting a silver coin with an expansive grin.

It was a drive of about a mile—sufficient to give the two British officers some idea of the size of Frankville, which in the last fifteen years had developed from a collection of half a dozen "cabins" to a modern town—even judging by American standards—of some fifty thousand inhabitants.

Although there were no skyscrapers there were several palatial buildings of five or six stories, well-stocked shops—or stores as John had already learned to call them—and rows of houses each standing in its own grounds and with its private garage.

Palm trees lined the sidewalks, together with telephone and electric-power poles.

The Three Palms Hotel was on the water-front—a rambling three-storied building composed mainly of plate glass and concrete. It was separated from the Atlantic by a wide road and a stretch of yellow sands. A few hundred yards to the north could be seen one extremity of a cove that formed a natural protection to the creek on the banks of which were the slips and workshops of "Frankville Shipbuilding, Incorporated". It was there that Cloche and Frazer had come several thousand miles to undertake "Special and Secret Duties".

"Not a bad show!" declared Shorty, appraising their new quarters. "Well, it's a good thing a benevolent Government's paying our expenses."

They paid off the taximan. Then, somewhat to their surprise, two American sailors emerged from the building, saluted in a way that implied they shouldn't have paid the compliment to Britishers but perhaps they'd better, and announced they'd see to the baggage.

"An' the ship's office is in thayer," added one, pointing to the main entrance.

Evidently, like similar establishments at home, the Three Palms Hotel had been requisitioned and was now a Naval Establishment. But with this difference: instead of the White Ensign displayed from the gaff of a flagstaff in front of the building there was the familiar Stars and Stripes.

"So you've arrived. Come right in!" was their greeting from a white-uniformed American Naval Officer. "Welcome to the U.S.S.S. *Pennington*. You'll find a bunch of Britishers here already, I guess. I've allocated you to cabins 201 and 202. I guess you'll be comfortable. If you aren't, put me wise and I'll sure look to it."

The "cabins" proved to be well-furnished rooms on the first floor with bathroom attached and large plate-glass windows opening on to a wide veranda, which in turn was fitted with sliding glazed panels that could be closed during on-shore gales—prevalent during the "hurricane months" on this part of the Atlantic seaboard.

"This is money for jam!" thought John after he had had a bath and had "shifted" into white uniform. Only a couple of days ago he had been shivering in Halifax in spite of winter rig and heavy

94 Operations Successfully Executed

greatcoat. Now the temperature in the shade was somewhere in the nineties!

He went out into the corridor and tapped on Frazer's door, to which, as in the case of his own, a square of cardboard had been affixed giving the occupier's name and, lest there should be any doubt on the matter, the letters R.N.V.R.

"Coming!" replied Shorty from within. "Blow in if you want to. I've nearly finished unstowing!"

John waited outside, strolling up and down the corridor and studying the "nameplates" of his new shipmates.

The "cabins" had, it seemed, been apportioned with impartiality, with American officers alongside their British confreres. Degrees of rank were similar in both cases, except that in the American navy there were Junior Lieutenants and Ensigns, the latter ranking with the British midshipman.

Later on, incidentally, the badges of rank worn by American ratings puzzled him until he was "put wise". For instance a carpenter displayed a square on his sleeve, while his British counterpart, termed an "artisan", wears as badge a crossed hammer and axe. Again, "crossed anchors" worn by an American sailor denote that his rank is that of boatswain, but a similar device (surmounted by a crown) on the left arm of a British rating indicates that he is a petty officer.

It was guest-night in the mess that evening. When the well- and heavily-laden table had been cleared and the port circulated the first toast was announced, and the way in which it was done afforded

John yet another instance of the cordial yet punctilious relations between representatives of the two great navies.

"Gentlemen!" announced the toast-master, "I call upon you to drink the healths of the King of England and the President of the United States: the President of the United States and the King of England!"—thus leaving no chance of the question of precedence in the minds of those honouring the toast.

Surprising, too, was the last toast, given when the glasses were empty.

"To Tojo and Hitler, may utter defeat and just punishment be their fate!"

It was drunk with acclamation, the British officers following their American allies' example by placing their glasses bottom upwards upon the board!

Quite a number of Americans regarded Japan as Enemy No. 1, for, like Hitler, who had treacherously broken his solemn promise that he would make no further territorial demands upon Europe, Tojo had ordered a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour at the very moment when Japanese statesmen were discussing peace proposals in Washington.

It was nearly midnight before John turned in. Although tired he couldn't sleep. It had been an exciting day and one incident stood out above all the rest.

"Now where did I see that fellow before?" he asked himself for the twentieth time. "Harboard he called himself."

Then like a flash enlightenment came.

"It must be the same blighter that tried to be

96 Operations Successfully Executed

pally at Torquay. He called himself Tre—something, then. And he planted that incendiary pencil and looked as if he had the wind up badly when he got off the Exeter bus at Teignmouth. I wonder if he recognized me to-day? And, by Jupiter! I remember now; when that negro porter told him he'd missed somebody he swore. And unless I'm greatly mistaken he swore in German!"

CHAPTER IX

"Slippery as an Eel"

Next morning John and Shorty entered upon their new duties in earnest. After breakfast they had to attend a meeting with British and American officials, both naval and civilian, where more and precise information was given them concerning their duties.

At the Frankville shipyard they were informed a new type of naval craft was well advanced in course of construction—a fleet of carriers for taking midget submarines nearer the scene of action.

These were ungainly-looking vessels of some eight thousand tons displacement. Outwardly they somewhat resembled America's Victory ships, but there the resemblance ended. They were square-sterned to well below their loadline when floating light. Each had twin propellers and two rudders. Between the latter was a pair of large watertight doors that when opened would admit two midget

submarines side by side. The greater part of what was in other ships the hold, was a floating basin that would accommodate half a dozen “midgets”. Once they were within, the water would be pumped out, leaving the waspish little craft high and dry and secured on chocks until the time came for them to be liberated to go into the attack.

Twelve of these carriers were being built simultaneously at Frankville—two allocated to Britain, the rest for service against the Japanese.

In addition pocket submarines, similar to those in operation for training purposes in far-off Loch Angus, were either completed or were under construction in Frankville shipyards.

“Your particular duties will be,” continued the Senior Naval Officer, “to make yourselves accustomed to taking the submarines in and out of their parent ship. Quite possibly you will ask why such a method of transport has been adopted. Under ordinary conditions submarines of the displacement—thirty tons—could be lifted in and out by means of a derrick. So they could be in relatively smooth water, but you will realize that in a seaway the surge would put such an operation out of court. Hence the underwater means of access to the parent ship.

“You will be given full opportunity to examine the blue-prints and to make yourselves fully acquainted with the constructional and other details of the carriers. Then, when you have undergone a practical course in the work of docking and undocking the midgets—I’m referring to the immersed holds of the carriers as docks—you will navigate them to

98 Operations Successfully Executed

a British port. I need hardly remind you of the utmost necessity for secrecy. Once details of these carriers reach the enemy the element of surprise so essential in modern warfare is lost."

"In connexion with that most important point, sir, might I make a statement?" asked John.

"Sure!" replied one of the American officers.

"I have good reason for thinking that already there is a German Secret Service Agent in Frankville."

"How do you know?" asked the American. "I guess you didn't arrive before yesterday. It's sure slick business if what you say is right. I'll trouble you to explain, Lieutenant Clochel!"

At some length, since it was necessary to go into details, John described what had happened at Torquay, and how the suspect had left the bus at Teignmouth in a decided state of agitation. He went on to give an account of how the pencil dropped by the fellow and picked up by him had burst into flames in one of the rooms at the Admiralty.

"Gee! But we've had no fire-raising here, have we, Schofield?" said the Senior Naval Officer, appealing to one of his colleagues.

"I guess not, Chief!" was the reply.

"What reason have you for supposing he is in this town?" continued John's questioner.

"Because he was at the station—sorry, the depot—when we arrived last night. I knew I'd seen him somewhere, but I couldn't quite fix him. Whether he recognized me I don't know, since I was in plain clothes on the two previous occasions. But I do know he goes under the name of Harboard and that

he was expecting to meet someone called Dixon."

"I guess if he's anywhere about we'll soon get him," declared the S.N.O.

He raised the receiver of a telephone on his desk, dialled and waited.

"Chief speaking. Send Murtough in instanter!"

"What kind of guy is this Harboard?" pursued the American officer.

John gave a description to the best of his ability. It wasn't very helpful. Only a comparatively few people can be trusted to give an accurate description of a chance acquaintance, and John wasn't one of them. For one thing he had debited *Ober-leutnant* Hans Schenk, *alias* Anthony Trefusis, *alias* Oscar G. Harboard, with ten years above his right age.

A knock on the door interrupted the proceedings, and a burly American naval lieutenant, wearing a khaki armband with the word "Police" in red lettering, appeared.

"Sorr?" he inquired in Irish accents, and giving a smart salute. "Phwat will you be wantin'?"

"An arrest and you to be mighty slick about it, Murtough! . . . No, not these," he added hastily as the naval police officer's eyes turned in John's and Shorty's direction. "A Heinie, roaming about Frankville."

"Gimme one good clue, an' Oi'll be having the bracelets on him inside an hour," declared Murtough, pulling out notebook and pencil.

Having been given the available descriptions of the suspect, Murtough withdrew to summon his

100 Operations Successfully Executed

henchmen. A "patrol cop" in New York until America's entry into the War, he prided himself upon the claim—justifiable in many cases—that a fugitive from justice hadn't much chance once Patrick Murtough was on the trail!

The rest of the morning, so far as John and Shorty were concerned, was taken up in examining blue-prints under the supervision of a young naval constructor.

"Mebbe you've asked yourselves," he said, "why our midget subs. have their torpedo tubes built into them and not hung on outside like the Jap and Italian ones."

"They certainly take up a lot of space within the hull," admitted Frazer. "I suppose there are advantages?"

"Sure. Supposing you were taking a sub. out and the parent ship was pitching and rolling some in a seaway. And supposing both tubes were outside. There's the risk of bumping against the sides of the doors, the tube gets dented badly—and what good is the submarine then? And the bump might touch off the explosive in the warhead. You wouldn't know anything about it, but it would sink the parent ship and every other midget she was carrying. That doesn't make sense, I guess!"

"It certainly doesn't," agreed John. "You mentioned just now about Italian midget submarines having exterior tubes. I may be able to give you some interesting facts."

"Sure I'm listening, Mister Cloche!"

"Soon after we landed in Algeria—and I learned

this when I was at Gib. from an unimpeachable source—Italian midget subs. made an attack upon Allied warships in Algiers harbour.”

“You’re tellin’ me,” interrupted the American with a cheerful grin. “I was there, right on the spot.”

“Then you know the attack failed? Do you happen to know why it did?”

The other shook his head.

“You’ve gotten me guessing,” he replied.

“I can supply that information,” continued John. “It’s authentic. Two Italian midget submarines approached Algiers and manœuvred to attack a cruiser.” He diplomatically avoided mentioning that it was a warship wearing the Stars and Stripes that had been the intended victim. “None of the torpedoes could be fired. The operation was a fiasco,” he continued, “and when the submarines were hoisted on board their parent ship it was found that all the tubes were choked with seaweed.”

John and Shorty remained in the room studying plans and hearing explanations from their instructor until it was time for the usual break.

“We’ll go along to the yard this afternoon,” suggested the latter. “What you’ll be seeing will make your eyes open, but you’ll keep your mouths closed like a couple of clams.”

“Sure thing!” declared Shorty, adopting the phraseology of the country in which he was now a guest.

Just after the officers had assembled for the mid-day repast—for there was no other word to describe

102 Operations Successfully Executed

it fittingly—Pat Murtough appeared looking anything but pleased.

"The skunk's slipped through me fingers, Commander," he announced. "Mebbe someone's put him wise. Oi looked up the Federal police bureau. They had him on the register O.K.; he'd an apartment at 51 Semmes Street and was travelling for Nortoft Inc. of Noo York. Wall! We went round to Semmes Street, but he wasn't there. The janitor told me he hadn't been in since five yesterday. Oi went along to the depot and they told me a guy answering Harboard's description had boarded a car for Washington at ten. Next Oi 'phoned Nortoft, and they knew nothing except that a drummer of that name had been in their employ but had been sacked 'way back in '39. From their description it sure couldn't be the same man. Yes, he's given us the slip, Oi guess!"

"Bad luck, Murtough."

"Oi'll lay me hands on him yet," declared the Security Police officer. "The police in five States have been given the word to look out for him."

"How long has he been in Frankville?"

"Not more'n fourteen days."

"Enough to do a lot of mischief, if he is a spy," commented the Senior Naval Officer. "Keep going, Murtough, and inform me directly there's any more news of his movements."

Slippery as an eel, Hans Schenk, otherwise Oscar G. Harboard, had eluded the net.

Landed from a U-boat operating in the Carib-

bean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico—the scene was Apalachee Bay on the west coast of Florida—he had made his way, as directed, to Frankville. Then, so far as could be ascertained, he never attempted to secure even a single order on behalf of Nortoft Incorporated, and he was unable to gather any useful information concerning the shipyards and their activities.

Ten days after his arrival at Frankville he had become friendly with a man called Dixon, who in course of conversation hinted that he was wise about what was going on in ship construction. Actually he knew very little, but he had arranged to meet Schenk at the depot and then have supper together.

For some unknown reason, Dixon failed to keep the appointment, but while Schenk was waiting he happened to catch sight of two British naval officers in uniform. He didn't recognize Cloche and neither did John recognize him at the time, but a guilty conscience aided by Dixon's unaccountable non-appearance had led him to believe that Cloche and his companion had him under observation.

He panicked. At the risk of being discredited and betrayed by the German Government he suddenly made up his mind to shake the dust of Frankville off his shoes. Hurrying back to his rooms—the janitor wasn't present and therefore knew nothing of the visit until Murtough, searching the place for documents and other evidence, discovered that the bird had flown without leaving a trace—Schenk collected his belongings and took the next

104 Operations Successfully Executed

north-bound train. His ticket was for Washington, but he alighted at Savannah and took another ticket for New Orleans. Here, if his luck held, he hoped to find a ship bound for Lisbon, the only neutral port of any size on the European side of the Atlantic.

Even if he failed to find a ship that wasn't going to worry him. Amongst the teeming inhabitants of New Orleans he should be able to avoid detection. He might find good employment and in due course become an American citizen.

From what he'd seen of the Fatherland during his last visit, Germany was losing the war. He remembered his youthful days in the terrible years following the First World War. He'd no desire to experience a similar or even worse time. And in his mind another thing was certain—the Allies wouldn't be fooled next time over the peace conditions.

After many false alarms the scared fugitive Schenk arrived at his immediate destination.

Then he *did* have a shock, for posted conspicuously in the central hall of the station was a large placard.

ESPIONAGE

WANTED by the Federal Authorities of the U.S.A., Hans Schenk, an officer of the German Submarine Service, at large under the *alias* of Oscar G. Harboard. Height 5 ft. 10 in., heavy build, dark complexion, scar on right jawbone, gold filling in front tooth of upper jaw. A Reward of \$5000 is offered for information leading to the arrest of the aforesaid Hans Schenk.

To make matters worse for the demoralized German, there were photographs showing him in the same clothes that he happened to be wearing—recent photographs taken both full-faced and profile. Up to that moment he had no idea they were in existence.

Lieutenant Pat Murtough had described him as being as slippery as an eel, yet slippery eels are frequently caught!

CHAPTER X

H.M. Carrier “Turpentine”

“Bows-on they remind one of a row of ancient Greek vases—amphoræ, I think, is the name,” remarked Shorty Frazer when the chums had their first view of a fleet of midget submarines out of water. Although they were practically, but with certain modifications, similar to the ones attached to H.M.S. *Sulphurous*, on which the two R.N.V.R. lieutenants had undergone preliminary training, the fact that they were high and dry afforded a different aspect.

There were ten of these craft ready for trials. Others in various stages of construction occupied several mass-assembly workshops. Twelve were “earmarked” for the British navy, the others were “rods in pickle” for Japan when the moment arrived for naval warfare to be carried to her doorstep.

106 Operations Successfully Executed

Workmen were swarming everywhere. The extensive yards echoed and re-echoed to the rattle of power-operated drills, hammers and other tools, although the bulk of the hull construction was performed by welding. John was particularly impressed by the absence of dirt, smoke and steam, conditions under which ships are built in British yards. Practically all the power was electrically operated, the current being generated by hydro-turbines from a station some thirty miles inland.

"I guess you'd better be starting practical training to-morrow," suggested their instructor and guide. "You will be working with 'Merican crews until the British care-and-maintenance party arrive."

This was news. Until then John and his companion did not expect that the little craft would be manned by Royal Naval units until they had been ferried across the "Herring Pond".

Re-entering the car placed at their disposal, and still accompanied by their guide, they were taken to another part of the shipyard where the carriers were being built.

It was a distance of only a little over a hundred yards. At home bases they would have walked. Here, willy-nilly, they found themselves conforming to American conditions. Almost everyone in Frankville owned an "auto" and never walked if they could cover even absurdly short distances in a vehicle.

"I'm putting on weight fast," declared John. "I weighed myself this morning and found I was eleven and a half stone."

"You'll have to sweat some of that down, old

son," said Shorty judicially. "Lack of proper exercise and too much devotion to the flesh-pots are bad from a service point of view."

"Well, what do you weigh, anyway?" countered John.

Frazer confessed he didn't know. Last time he was on the scale he "just topped eleven seven".

The car pulled up.

"Try these scales," suggested their American guide. "They'll put you wise."

He indicated a steel plate, roughly thirty feet by ten, and flush with the ground. Somewhat similar objects; only smaller, were common objects at home in coal merchants' yards, railway goods stations and the like.

"Those won't give a man's weight accurately," observed Shorty.

"I guess they will," replied their companion. "Every bit of metal worked into a ship has to be weighed on one of these, and they are dead accurate up to forty tons."

Frazer stood upon the platform. There was no attendant to manipulate weight and steelyard. Instead the weight was automatically recorded on a white-enamelled dial.

"Twelve stones eleven pounds!" exclaimed John gleefully.

"Can't be," protested Shorty. "And you're six inches taller. You try, old lad. You try."

John obliged. The indicator recorded eleven stones seven pounds, which was exactly his weight earlier in the day.

108 Operations Successfully Executed

"Now what price the flesh-pots?" demanded John. "If you go on much longer at that rate you'll be too tubby to squeeze through a hatch and that'll put the kibosh on submarining for you, graceful willow that you are!"

"C'mon now!" urged their instructor. "I guess you haven't made this trip to examine our plant but the ships they turn out."

A short distance away was a slip where, surrounded by a forest of steel scaffolding and gantries, was a "sub-carrier" nearly ready for launching.

"We're just in time," observed their guide. "They're testing the flood-gates. Watch your step and come this way."

John found himself facing the rectangular and slightly oblique stern. To right and left were the rudders and propellers, immediately in front double doors, so accurately contrived that the joints would be invisible at fifty yards. He'd seen the plans, now he was seeing the real, almost finished product.

Hanging over the high taffrail were officials and workmen stationed to observe the manipulators of the huge double doors, while others worked the levers operating the mechanism. Power had been laid on by cable, but when the vessel was commissioned the gates would be opened and shut by electric power generated by the oil-fed machinery.

A word of command and the big rectangular doors opened outwards, disclosing a lofty steel-lined tank, on the floor of which were six sets of chocks in two parallel lines ready to accommodate

the same number of midget submarines at no distant date.

"Come on board," invited their guide. "Be slippy, just in case those doors slam! Hold fast there!" he shouted to the party at the controls, whereas a British seaman would have given the cautionary "Belay there!"

They lost no time in entering what was virtually an enormous tank, capable of being emptied or filled at will, though as they did so John noticed the massive india-rubber padding to the frame of each door, and mentally compared the width of the aperture with the beam of a midget submarine. He came to the conclusion that there was ample clearance provided the parent ship wasn't heaving in a big seaway.

He mentioned that to his instructor.

"Gee! Ever seen the effects of ile on rough waves?"

John had more than once, but not on account of danger to the ship by reason of tempest; with quite a heavy sea running he'd seen oil from a sunken U-boat beat the curling crests down to a sullen swell over a wide area.

As is the case with American designed and built craft, the interior accommodation was comfortable and revolutionary compared with British standards.

Officers of the Executive Branch were berthed well for'ard, within easy reach of the bridge; abaft and on either side of the submarine pen, that extended to the upper deck, was accommodation for the seamen.

110 Operations Successfully Executed

Each officer's cabin was furnished with a swing bunk, with the object of ensuring rest even when the vessel was rolling in a heavy sea. There were both radiators and electric fans, which seemed to indicate that these vessels would be operating both in Arctic and tropical waters. All the metal fittings were rustless, the decks were covered with glazed though non-slip corticene, which drastically reduced the work of the "sweepers" as those ratings detailed for keeping the ship clean are termed.

There was also an innovation in the form of a "soda fountain" with ice-making apparatus. At least it was an innovation from the Royal Navy's point of view, although they had been installed in ships of the American navy before the First Great War.

"Saturday night at sea: you and I will be down here, with sleeves rolled up and with aprons on, dishing out soft drinks to thirsty matlots!" said Shorty facetiously.

"That would be preferable to having to deal with defaulters who are three sheets in the wind!" rejoined John. "All the same, on a wintry day inside the Arctic Circle the hands would prefer grog—and there is something to be said in favour of old naval customs."

"What is grog?" inquired their guide.

"Rum watered down," explained John. "So called because it was introduced into the navy by Admiral Vernon, whose nickname was Old Grog."

"I sure don't get the connexion," said the American.

"Neither do I," admitted John.

"It was because the Admiral wore a cloak made of some stuff called Grogram," explained Shorty, somewhat to John's surprise.

"Say, how far back did that guy live?" inquired the instructor.

"Nearly two hundred years."

"Two hundred years? From what you've been tellin' me, I reckoned he was in command just a short while back. Gee, nearly two hundred years; best forget it, I guess! Come along aft and see the engine-rooms."

He just couldn't fathom it! Here were two British officers almost casually alluding to a deep-rooted traditional practice of the British navy instituted in 1745, or thirty-one years before the United States came into being.

Next they were taken to see two craft of this class that had been launched and were awaiting trials. These were the two allocated to the Royal Navy and named H.M. Tankers *Turpentine* and *Terebine* respectively. John was given to understand that as soon as the crews arrived from Britain he would commission the former and Frazer the other. Meanwhile, with American crews, they would undergo more practical training in the midget submarines.

It was a perfect morning—almost too much so—when the *Turpentine*, with only two "satellites" in her capacious hold, cast off from her berth in Frankville creek and proceeded seaward.

"I suppose there are no U-boats about," ob-

112 Operations Successfully Executed

served John as a U.S.A. blimp cruised overhead. "It wouldn't be fun being torpedoed on your doorstep, sir, so to speak."

The lieutenant-commander smiled.

"I guess it would not," he replied. "There have been no U-boats reported this side for three months, although they've been operating in the Caribbean some. Mebbe if there are they wouldn't stand a rattler's chance with our airships around. You'd better get aboard, gentlemen, and we'll start the performance."

"Performance sounds good. I hope that blimp won't mistake us for a Hun," thought John as he and Shorty went to collect their respective crews and man the two midget submarines—two U.S.A. ratings for each.

From the main deck watertight doors gave access to the "pen", which was now empty of water. Electric lights overhead had already been switched on, flooding the huge, cavernous hold with a steely blue glare.

The two submarines, held down in chocks by large bottle-screws, were at the for'ard end of the pen. Above them was a cat-walk—one of half a dozen from which rope ladders dangled to the decks of the two small craft.

Near the double doors, still firmly closed by water-pressure from without, men were standing up in readiness to warp the midgets out.

"Well, cheerio for the present, old son!" exclaimed Shorty as, according to custom common to both navies, he was about to follow his crew on

board. "Don't bump into me if you can help it!"

"Bumping and boring on the course means disqualification," quoted John. "I'll keep my weather-eye lifting!"

"Fat lot of good that'll be," scoffed Shorty jocularly. "Better put your trust in the radio telephone."

On board each craft the mechanician—otherwise chief stoker—was preparing to start up the electric motor. The officer in command and the other rating remained on deck to con the midget out of her parent ship into the now placid waters of the Atlantic.

"O.K., sir!" reported the mechanician.

"Good!" replied John, and gave the prescribed signal that his craft was ready to be floated off the chocks. "Cast off securing chains."

On board the other pocket submarine similar action was being taken. Then, on another signal being given, the sluice gates were opened and tons of water began to pour into the pen.

Held only by the chocks and by ropes to prevent them from surging in the miniature maelstrom, both craft were speedily waterborne, and as soon as the water within the ship's hold made a level with that of the sea without, the double doors were swung outward.

"Touch astern!" ordered John.

There he made a mistake, since a craft fitted with a single screw cannot be relied upon to keep a straight course under the reverse action of her propeller.

114 Operations Successfully Executed

True to type the submarine's stern began to swing to port. The men berthing her out hastily took quick turns with their lines round convenient bollards. The warps on the starboard quarter were strained almost to breaking point.

Realizing almost too late that something was wrong and that he was the cause of it, John ordered the clutch to be thrown out. For perhaps fifteen seconds he sweated with apprehension, until a slackening of the securing lines told him that what might have been a serious mishap had been averted.

Not until the submarine's quarter was clear of the carrier's entry-port did John again give the order to go astern. Then, as the guide ropes were cast off, the little craft glided into the open.

At half a cable's length John waited to watch Frazer's handling of his craft. Shorty, who had seen the "mess-pot" his opposite number had almost made, had profited by the experience. Without even touching the bolstered door-jambs his vessel backed clear of her parent ship, stopped, went ahead and ranged up within easy hailing distance of her "opposite number".

From the stern of the *Turpentine* a voice through a loud-speaker addressed the officers in command of the two midgets.

"Dive to fifty feet, course 345 degrees. Attack target distant five miles. *En échelon* formation!"

John raised one arm to indicate that the message had been received and had been understood. Then ordering the rating below, he followed the man

down, secured the hatch and gave the word to stand by to submerge.

Down to the required depth the now hermetically sealed craft dived. Unlike the earlier types of submarine, she was not entirely cut off from the outside world. By radio telephone she was in touch not only with her parent carrier but with her similarly submerged consort, while to reduce the risk of a collision with her to a minimum an echo-sounding device automatically recorded the distance and bearing.

Each officer had been cautioned against the danger of suction, for should the midgets take up a line-ahead formation and the rearmost one draw too close to the one ahead, she might be carried forward with increased speed to crash into the leader's stern.

"Running blind", John had his hands full both literally and metaphorically. Not only had he to keep the given course and depth, he had also to watch half a dozen indicators, keep on the alert for radio signals and maintain a proper distance from Frazer's craft. In addition, if this were the "real thing" he'd have to judge the distance run, rise to periscope depth, note the bearing of the target (with her estimated speed and course if she were under way) and then release his torpedoes. And, it had to be remembered, the attack would almost certainly be made at night and under conditions favourable for surprise.

Everything seemed to be going well. The electric motors were running smoothly, the craft was well on her course.

116 Operations Successfully Executed

John glanced at the clock. Knowing the speed under water, he should be able to estimate the time required to bring her within easy range of the target, a large black spherical buoy with a red and white flag.

"Twenty-eight minutes," he thought. "Should be there by now. I'll have a look-see."

He brought the submarine up to periscope depth. Then he gave an involuntary gasp of surprise, for at first the object bowl revealed nothing but an unbroken expanse of sea and sky! Closer examination showed the *Turpentine* on the horizon, while nearer and between her and his craft was the target buoy.

He had completely overshot the latter and instead of it bearing dead ahead it was almost dead astern! There was little consolation to be derived from the knowledge that Shorty, also unaccountably, had made the same error.

Through the radio telephone came a voice from the parent ship—*Turpentine* calling both subs: "Say, what do you think you're doing? Making for the South Pole? Alter course sixteen points and attack me, and sure don't forget you've got a periscope!"

John could have kicked himself. He was passing through the Valley of Humiliation!

CHAPTER XI

Forestalled

Both craft did better at the next attempt, coming up to periscope depth several times to check their position for the mock attack upon the parent ship.

Then came the order for both craft to re-enter their floating pen. By this time a long heavy roll had set in, but the operation of berthing was performed not only without mishap but with comparative ease.

In the afternoon the operations were repeated and it was not until six in the evening that the *Turpentine* returned to her berth. Leaving an armed guard on board, the rest of her temporary crew went ashore, the officers to their quarters in the Three Palms Hotel, the ratings to their barracks adjoining the shipyard.

On arriving at the hotel John and Shorty had two surprises. The first was the appearance of two sub-lieutenants, R.N.V.R., who introduced themselves respectively as Hardy and Norton. They had arrived by rail earlier in the day with a party of a hundred seamen and engine-room ratings to take over *Turpentine* and *Terebine*. Both officers, hitherto unknown to John, had undergone submarine courses in H.M.S. *Sulphurous* after he had left that Scottish base. They were under instruction to act as seconds-in-command to Lieutenants Cloche and Frazer on

118 Operations Successfully Executed

the voyage of the two carriers to a British port.

It looked as if the two vessels, each carrying six midget submarines, were urgently required!

John didn't welcome the second surprise when he was informed that *Ober-leutnant* Hans Schenk had been arrested in New Orleans, and had been taken to Washington to be put on trial.

"I guess you'll have to attend the trial, Lieutenant Cloche," said Commander Schofield, U.S.N., who had given him the information about Schenk's capture.

"I hope not," demurred John, for although he was glad that the German Secret Service Agent had been laid by the heels, he didn't at all like the idea of making the long journey to Washington to give evidence. "Surely there's enough proof to convict him without my having to appear as a witness. Do you think he'll be convicted and executed?"

"I just don't know about being executed," drawled the American. "We over here can only fix him for espionage. There weren't any explosives found on him and there's no evidence to show that he had committed acts of sabotage against the U.S.A. Over in Britain he did, as you've been telling us, so mebbe your Government will apply for him to be indicted and then charged with a capital offence."

Another three weeks passed all too quickly in spite of intensive training taking up fourteen hours of each twenty-four.

The *Turpentine* and her sister ship had been taken over. The White Ensign was worn on both

ships in place of Old Glory. Refuelled and provisioned, they were due to sail for Liverpool on the following Wednesday.

Their American hosts had arranged to give the four British naval officers a farewell dinner on the previous Tuesday evening.

Shortly before eight o'clock, their work ended for the day, John and his three brother-officers were speeding along the water-front on their way back to their temporary home from home.

Night had already fallen although lights were shining from nearly every building in Frankville. No searchlights pointed long accusing fingers across the star-spangled Southern sky. The war seemed a long way off.

"But if a U-boat flotilla showed up in the offing," thought John, "what a target they'd have! Improbable but not impossible. And if a Boche aircraft carrier, eluding our patrols, started running amok off the stretch of coast! . . . Wily blighters the Huns! . . . Doesn't do to underrate them. Plenty of kick in them yet—right up to the final collapse!"

He recalled the recent loss of Cos and Leros and how he had had to listen to the discreetly worded criticisms of the American officers at the Three Palms. They simply just couldn't understand why the Britishers had even ventured to occupy these islands, with German-occupied Crete and Rhodes between them and their North African bases and without adequate air protection. The hard-gained lessons of the present war, that operations without overwhelming air superiority were rarely, if ever,

120 Operations Successfully Executed

successful, had been ignored. Both islands had fallen to the Huns, after they had heavily dive-bombed the garrisons, and this had no doubt had a restraining influence upon Turkey—since Cos and Leros were right on her doorstep—from entering the war as a belligerent ally.

"I'll be sorry, for some things, to quit Frankville," John confided to his companion as they lounged in the rear seat of the car as comfortably as tired limbs permitted.

"Same here, Seven Bells," agreed Frazer. "It's strange to think that in about another three weeks or so we may"—and he laid emphasis on the "may"—"be home groping our way about in the black-out! . . . Hello! What's all the excitement about?"

There was considerable and unwonted activity amongst the crowds on the sidewalks. Men in long white coats, bearing on their backs in black letters such legends as *The Frankville*, *The Monitor* and *The Evening Transcript*, were hurriedly disposing of their wares, still damp from the press, to the throngs that barred their progress. Autos, too, were pulling up, their passengers and in many cases their drivers grabbing the news-sheets and giving silver in return without attempting to take the change.

"What does it mean?" asked Sub-Lieutenant Trevor Hardy, R.N.V.R. "War over?"

By the tone of his voice John gathered that his new second-in-command was expressing disappointment. Hardy was a greenhand; he hadn't as yet seen a shot or a torpedo fired in anger. If he'd had

four and a half years of it, as Cloche had, he would have welcomed the end of hostilities—always provided, as legal documents have it, that Victory for the Allies had been won and foundations for a lasting peace assured.

“Stop, will you!” ordered John.

The negro driver—one-time chauffeur to a Senator, and now, in naval uniform, performing a similar office at Frankville Naval Yard—applied his brakes so fiercely that the car stopped dead in almost its own length.

As a result a car behind bumped none too gently into it. Usually such a procedure means high words and strong language on the part of the owner of the other car, but the victim merely called out, “O.K., boss. I was pulling up myself. . . . Hi, you, there! Gimme a noos sheet an’ look slippery!”

“Then it is that the War’s ended!” thought Cloche, for such magnanimous behaviour on the part of the driver of the other car seemed otherwise inexplicable. People cheering on the sidewalks seemed to give evidence to his belief.

He snatched a paper from the vendor, thrust a “nickel” into the man’s hand and, sitting back, read the latest cables from the European seat of war. Frazer craned his neck, while the two subs in the other seats waited agog for the news.

It was something that affected all four of them.

TIRPITZ TORPEDOED

ran the heavy-leaded headlines, and under them in smaller type: British Midget Torpedoboat’s Success.

122 Operations Successfully Executed

A thrill of acute disappointment flashed through John's mind. In all probability the other three men were similarly affected. They had been undergoing periods of intensive, specialized training, the *raison d'être* the destruction of Germany's largest battleship and sister to the ill-fated *Bismarck*. They didn't even know that pocket submarines, except those used for preliminary training and experimental work in Loch Angus, were in being in British waters. They had been sent to the U.S.A. to collect and tranship to home waters what they had believed to be the first boats of that class to wear the White Ensign. In that they had been forestalled and the great task to which they thought they were to be entrusted had been carried out by others.

But these sentiments were only transitory.

"Jolly good show!" ejaculated Sub-Lieutenant Trevor Hardy, voicing the revised sentiments of his companions and himself. "What does it say?"

John read the brief official account as reported by the British Admiralty at 9.45 p.m. Incidentally it had been received at Frankville, and the local papers with the announcement were on sale soon after 7 p.m., a state of affairs only made possible by cable and the five hours' difference between the western states and Greenwich.

The report was brief and to the point. Four pocket submarines (the term as applied to British craft of the class being "released" for the first time) had launched an attack on the *Tirpitz* as she was lying, heavily protected, at the head of a deep,

narrow Norwegian fiord. Three of the four attacking submarines failed to return, but the Admiralty entertained hopes that some of the crews had been rescued.

"But it doesn't say anything about the *Tirpitz* being sunk," observed Watson.

"No, no more it does," agreed John. "The headlines say she was torpedoed. She's a whopping big craft, and remember, the *Bismarck* stopped quite a number, in addition to heavy fire from our big guns, before she dipped. . . . Sorry, my error! Here's a 'stop press'. 'Aerial reconnaissance reveals that the German battleship has settled in shallow water surrounded by a large patch of oil. Salvage craft are in attendance.'"

"Then our fellows did get her," said Shorty. "Jolly good show, chaps. The Huns may be able to patch her up, but if they do, they'll have to take her to some Baltic port. It'll be months before they can do that, so we may have the chance of having a crack at her after all!"

CHAPTER XII

Escape

During the period following his arrest and the date fixed for his trial Hans Schenk felt far easier in his mind than he had done since he undertook his first espionage mission.

124 Operations Successfully Executed

He was under arrest, but even that was a relief. He was no longer haunted by the fear that at any moment a policeman's hand would be laid on his shoulder.

That moment had passed.

He was favourably impressed by the attitude of the Federal Authorities towards him. Had he been laid by the heels in Germany on a similar charge, he would have been tried and condemned almost within the hour and would have made the acquaintance of the white-gloved, top-hatted executioner with his gleaming axe early on the following morning—a similar threat that had haunted him many times in recent days.

But, contrary to what he had been led to believe, there were no Third Degree methods employed against him. He was given a "defence lawyer"—the American counterpart of the British solicitor on behalf of the accused—and had ample opportunity to confer with him upon the lines to be taken at the trial.

The lawyer, having informed him that no charge of sabotage was being brought against him, in so far as the U.S.A. authorities were concerned, suggested that Schenk should plead guilty to that of *attempted espionage*.

"I guess you'll get off with imprisonment for the duration of the war," he declared. "Mebbe the Britishers will try to have you extradited. From what you've told me about your activities over there—those 'fire-raising stunts—you'd sure find the hangman's rope round your neck."

To this suggestion the German turned a deaf ear. He had other ideas about admitting his guilt. He hadn't been caught red-handed. In fact he had never committed any act of espionage on American soil.

To his lawyer he made counter-proposals: that if he should be convicted—which he thought very unlikely—he would be willing to make a complete revelation of German espionage methods and plead that the sole reason for his landing in the U.S.A. was a desire to escape from the clutches of the Gestapo.

There was something in the last suggestion. Already the Nazis were more than harbouring the suspicion that Hans Schenk, formerly of the German navy, was double-crossing his double-crossing paymasters!

At the commencement of the trial Hans still retained his self-confidence.

The atmosphere of the Court contributed to this state of his mind. It was far different from that of German Courts of Law or of British for that matter.

There were no bewigged judges imposingly robed in scarlet and ermine, only a benign, gold-spectacled individual in morning dress.

Practically the only indication that it was a court of justice was provided by the two blue-uniformed, white-helmeted police officers standing beside him, nonchalantly swinging their clubs and surreptitiously chewing gum!

"Well, your honour, we can't produce one important witness, a British naval officer of the name

126 Operations Successfully Executed

of Cloche," declared the prosecuting lawyer. "He's left this country and I guess is half-way home."

"Wasn't he asked to sign an affidavit?" asked the judge.

"No, your honour."

"I guess we can get along without," decided the judge, who an hour ago had sentenced five gangsters to life imprisonment after a two-days hearing and didn't look forward to another two days in dealing with the charges against a German.

Three witnesses were called against the accused, including Lieutenant Murtough. Then Schenk was asked whether he had any witnesses.

Dixon, the man he was to have met at the depot at Frankville. All he could say was that Schenk, known to him as Oscar G. Harboard, had approached him on the matter of real estate and nothing more.

"Why did you give the name of Harboard?" asked the judge of the accused.

"Because I wanted to give up my German name!"

"In the circumstances quite understandable," rejoined the judge drily.

The jury retired to consider their verdict.

In five minutes they returned and found the prisoner guilty of subversive activities calculated to jeopardize the safety and security of the American people and State.

"Before I pass sentence," declared the judge, "the prisoner's lawyer has handed me a written statement in which Schenk offers to provide the Federal Authorities with full information, as lies

in his power, concerning the espionage system used by the Nazis and to offer his services against his former employer. From that I draw the conclusion that he admits his guilt. As for his base offer, I guess there's precious little in it that the State Authorities don't know already. The least sentence I can give—bearing in mind that it must act as a deterrent to other similarly debased persons—is twenty years' hard labour."

This sentence was received with tremendous applause both in the public galleries and in the well of the Court—applause that was allowed to continue for quite two minutes.

There was only one man who didn't feel pleased. That was Hans Schenk.

He was thunderstruck. Twenty years: it was worse than having to face a firing squad or the executioner's axe!

Hans was taken below. Here all his personal belongings, including his money, were taken from him. He had to sign a document enumerating the various articles, the warder grimly reminding him that they would be returned on the completion of his term of punishment.

Then, having been manacled, he was put into another room along with the five convicted gangsters. There were police to guard them: not truncheon-armed police but tough-looking guys with revolvers in their holsters.

The prisoners had not long to wait before a van—the American equivalent to the British "Black Maria"—arrived to take them to the penitentiary.

128 Operations Successfully Executed

Precautions were not relaxed when the prisoners entered the van. An armed policeman sat by the driver, another was on duty in the van, the double doors of which were locked, the keys being kept in the jailer's pocket.

"Behave yourselves, boys!" cautioned he. "'Tain't no use cuttin' up rough. Twenty days on bread an' water; it ain't worth it!"

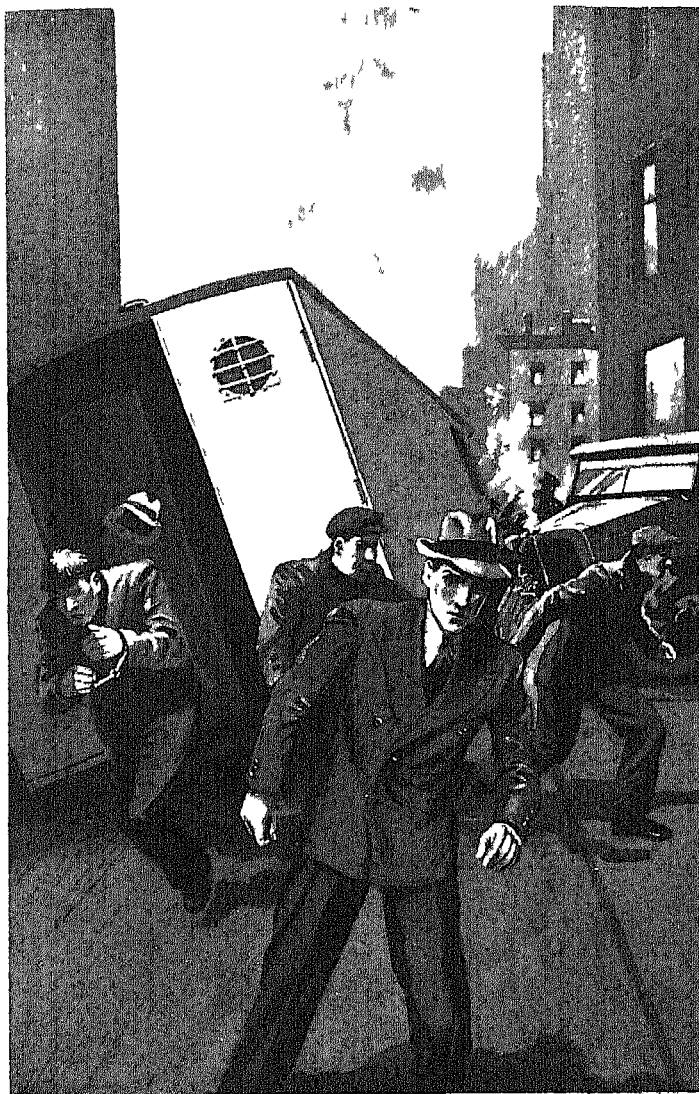
The interior of the van was ill-lighted. The prisoners sat three a side on benches, with the armed policeman separated from them by a partition with a gangway through the centre.

In less than a couple of minutes after the van had started on its journey Hans felt the fingers of the man next to him touching his wrist. At first he thought that it was a sympathetic gesture from one unfortunate man to another; but to his amazement his manacles were stealthily removed, leaving his hands free!

With a skeleton key, cunningly concealed in the lining of his jacket—for the prisoners would not exchange their ordinary clothes for the black and yellow prison dress until they arrived at the penitentiary—one of the gangsters had effected the removal of the handcuffs from himself and four of the other occupants of the van.

In the gloom a mistake had been made. Schenk had been mistaken for one of the gang!

A few blocks farther on another stage of the plan to free the gangsters materialized. The traffic lights were in the van's favour, but from a street on the right a heavy lorry came blindly round the corner.



60

HANS SCHENK GETS AWAY

Page 129

At least it appeared to do so, but its movements were controlled by a confederate signalling from the sidewalk.

It was a cool, calculated and deliberate crash intended to do the maximum damage to the police van and its driver and armed attendant and the minimum damage to the occupants.

The van slewed round and came to a standstill with the lorry's bonnet interlocked with its front part.

Except for a shaking the prisoners were unhurt. Not so the policeman inside the van. Thrown against the opposite side, he'd collapsed unconscious.

The gangsters, primed for their task, acted promptly. The keys of the door were taken from the jailer's pocket, the van was opened.

"Scram, you guys!" ordered the leader.

They "scrammed", four of them. So did Hans, leaving the remaining prisoner to follow, hampered by his unfastened "bracelets".

Attracted by the crash a crowd began to collect. Through this the four gangsters forced their way to a car that was waiting with its engine running.

Hans, hardly realizing that he was at least temporarily free, did not attempt to take to his heels. He walked away in the opposite direction to that followed by his late fellow-prisoners!

No one took any notice of him. The attention of the crowd was divided between the contemplation of the crashed vehicle and the arrival of armed police on motor cycles to take up the pursuit of the four gangsters.

The fifth, who was conspicuous by reason of the

130 Operations Successfully Executed

steel manacles on his wrists, was rearrested by a patrol cop without offering any resistance.

Hans proceeded on his aimless way. He was a stranger to the city. His first thoughts were to get away from it as soon as possible. Trolley cars passed at frequent intervals; they were not for him, since he hadn't a cent on him.

Money he must have even if he went to the length of committing physical violence. During his espionage days he had drawn the line at that. Now it didn't matter in the slightest degree what he did to regain his liberty. If he failed to do so and an additional charge of maliciously wounding or attempted murder was brought against him, any extra sentence beyond the twenty years wouldn't signify. To him twenty years was a life sentence.

He entered two small stores, saw there were three or four youngish men behind the counter, asked for some article they weren't likely to have—he couldn't have bought it if they had—and went out again. The odds were too much against him.

On his third attempt he was successful. A small old man asked him what he wanted. It was late afternoon and the storekeeper was thinking of switching on the electric light. He'd hardly be able to recognize his customer again.

Schenk felled him with a blow to the point of his chin. His head hit a barrel with a disconcerting thud.

Perhaps he'd killed the man. He didn't mean to but there it was. Paying no more attention to his victim, the German ransacked the till.

There wasn't much in it, but better than nothing: fifteen one-dollar bills and about another five dollars in cents and dimes.

He walked away from the scene of his crime. To run would have aroused suspicion. Already the hue and cry had been raised, but so far the attentions of the police had been directed along the route known to have been taken by the escaping gangsters.

Boarding a bus, Hans was thirty miles from Washington before nightfall. Without luggage he daren't proceed farther in the stage.

That night he slept under a haystack. Next morning he bought breakfast at a wayside restaurant and at the next town he purchased a razor.

In three days, hitch-hiking a considerable part of the way, he reached New York.

If he had been content to remain there he might have fared well. There were jobs for the asking—good paying ones—with few questions asked. A plausible tale would have provided him with an identity card, and obtaining food required little ingenuity. Compared with Great Britain, it was easy for a stranger to move about freely.

But Schenk was a sailor. The sight of the harbour brought an incredible yearning to go afloat once more.

In a sordid tenement in Harlem he found lodgings. That evening he got hold of a two-days-old newspaper, containing an account of his trial and subsequent escape. The American Press laid particular stress upon the fact that he had offered his services to the American State and their com-

132 Operations Successfully Executed

ments did not ease his anxieties. If the Nazis saw that paper, as they almost certainly would, they would do all they could through their espionage network to wreak vengeance upon him.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a seemingly golden opportunity towards freedom offered itself.

In the same tenement was a British merchant seaman who was "laying off" after his ship had been torpedoed and the crew landed in New York. His name was Jimmy House and he had been ordered by the Shipping Board to join the S.S. *Amber Star* bound for Buenos Aires—at least so he had been given to understand—by someone who knew no more of her immediate destination than he did!

Aided by an injudicious number of drinks, Hans, who had assumed yet another name, and Jimmy soon became chummy.

Amongst other things House mentioned that he was due to join the *Amber Star* on the following morning, that she was bound for the River Plate, and that he wasn't at all keen on the South American "run". Of course, being British, he'd go, but he would much rather have been sent to a home-bound vessel because it would give him the chance to see his wife and family.

These admissions gave Schenk food for thought. Since Jimmy House had said he was going where he was sent, it seemed no use attempting to change identities. The only possible course, he decided, was to get the man blind drunk, steal his personal belongings and pay one of the negro dwellers in

the tenement to keep the inebriated man under lock and key until after the time fixed for the *Amber Star's* sailing.

It worked all right!

Carrying Jimmy House's kitbag and with his "papers" in his pocket, Schenk presented himself at the offices of the Federal Shipping Board. It was a rush hour and the officials couldn't cope with it in the usual searching way they adopted.

Schenk boarded the *Amber Star* with the rest of the deck hands and firemen, was detailed to the starboard watch and told he'd better lay aft to the crew's quarters and secure his bunk.

An hour later the ship sailed. It was not until she was outside Sandy Hook that she swung on an easterly course.

Her master had opened his sealed orders.

Quickly the news of her destination ran round the ship. Because she had a good turn of speed she was being sent unescorted across the Atlantic without waiting to take her place in a convoy.

Her destination wasn't Buenos Aires, it was Liverpool!

CHAPTER XIII

Nemesis

Hans Schenk's first reactions to the disturbing information were those of sheer funk. For him two distinct dangers lay ahead. First, the risk of being torpedoed by a U-boat; secondly, if and when he

134 Operations Successfully Executed

landed at a British port there might be police waiting for him on the quayside. There would be ample time for Jimmy House to recover from his debauch, inform the New York police of what had happened, and give a description of his erstwhile boon companion. And that description might be applied to Hans Schenk, the convicted German spy for whom there was a hue and cry over the greater part of the North American continent.

The British Authorities would almost certainly raise objections to extradition, preferring to hold him on a more serious charge—that of espionage in England. In that case he knew the penalty—the hangman's rope!

If only the ship were bound for Buenos Aires! The relations between Argentine and the U.S.A. weren't exactly cordial. In fact the South American republic was favourably inclined to the Axis—or what was left of it.

Tentatively Hans mentioned the U-boat menace to some of his messmates. They laughed at his fears. Sinkings of Allied shipping in the North Atlantic had almost reached vanishing point, while improved methods of counter-attack had taken a very heavy toll of U-boats.

Several of the hands had been in torpedoed ships during the critical years of the *Unterseebooten* menace. It seemed almost beyond belief to him—an ex-German submarine commander—that these men could have the courage and determination to risk their ships being sent to the bottom again and again and still make light of their experiences!

Just before dawn on the third day out two violent explosions shook the ship, throwing Hans and several of his messmates out of their bunks.

They rushed on deck. Already the *Amber Star*, hit by two torpedoes, was settling down by the stern. Her engines were stopped and, seeing the vessel was doomed, the Captain had given the order "Abandon ship".

"No 'urry, you perishin' louse!" shouted one of the quartermasters as Hans made a rush for the nearest boat. "Don't you know yer proper lifeboat station?"

But there was need to hurry. It was panic that had to be checked, and of all the crew Schenk was the only one to display it.

The last boatload of survivors—for an officer, three seamen and five greasers had been killed by the explosion—got away in the nick of time. There had been no opportunity to send out a radio signal for aid, and the torpedoing had occurred well off the wartime steamship track.

Mutely the survivors watched their ship make her last plunge. The boats lay within easy hailing distance of each other, while the master, chief and third officer in their respective craft conferred as to the course to be set and upon the urgency of the boats keeping together.

Suddenly there came the warning shout:

"Periscope, sir!"

At a cable's distance the U-boat broke surface. Her commander and most of her crew appeared on deck to revel in the sight of the "Englanders"

136 Operations Successfully Executed

tossing about in open boats in the midst of the broad Atlantic. All the same, it was evident by the way they scanned the horizon and the sky that they were like "cats on hot bricks" while the U-boat was lying awash.

The German commander, speaking fairly good English, ordered the captain of the *Amber Star* alongside.

He wanted particulars of his "kill".

Hans Schenk was in the captain's boat. He sat with averted face in the stroke thwart—the only one in the boat to do so. The others looked inquisitively and unshrinkingly at the U-boat that had sent their ship to the bottom.

"I very sorry, sir, I cannot receive you as specimen, *Kapitan*," declared the U-boat commander, after an interview with the *Amber Star's* Old Man out of which he gained no information beyond what he knew already. "Dis is beginning of der cruise an' I haf no wish to haf an Englishman on board all der time. Perhaps you haf der same view?"

He laughed immoderately at his own joke. Then suddenly he stopped.

Schenk felt the blood rising to the back of his neck. Although he wasn't looking in that direction, instinctively he knew that the German was looking at *him*.

Then the *Kapitan* spoke again. This time he spoke in German.

"Heavens, it is Hans Schenk, former *Kapitan-leutnant* of the German navy!" he declared in scornful tones and with marked emphasis on the "former".

"For you, Hans Schenk, there is room—very cramped quarters—on board my command. Nevertheless a very warm welcome awaits you when I return you to the Fatherland."

Slowly Schenk, his face now pale with fright, stepped from the boat to the U-boat's narrow deck. At a word from the *Kapitan* two seamen took him below.

The U-boat then forged ahead and presently submerged.

"Schenk?" queried the master of the *Amber Star*. "That must be the fellow there was so much fuss about when we were lying in New York. I thought his name was House."

"Quite possibly you are right, sir," said the chief officer. "Well, if ever a fellow looked as if he'd tossed for his dinner and lost it that poor blighter did!"

"Aye, indeed! . . . Course nor'east by east, Mister. We're only four hundred miles from Land's End, and if this breeze holds we'll make it in three days—unless we're picked up first."

"Smoke on the horizon, sir!" reported the third officer. "I've been watching it. It's definitely coming nearer. Sloops or destroyers, I reckon."

"I'm not a betting man as a rule," rejoined the master, as he extracted a Very pistol from the locker in the stern-sheet. "But I'll lay a month's pay against yours that we'll be seeing a White Ensign inside of half an hour!"

"Not in these trousers, sir!" declared the chief officer inelegantly.

CHAPTER XIV

In the First Watch

John Cloche was considerably worried concerning his new task—that of getting H.M. Tankers *Turpentine* and *Terebine* across the Atlantic. As senior naval officer he was more or less responsible for the voyage. Both ships were under-officered and short of their full complements of ratings. That seemed inevitable. The heavy demands made upon man-power at home were making themselves felt. New ships were being commissioned daily, often with a large percentage of their crews consisting of hastily trained men. Yet, strange to relate, they were doing remarkably well. With ninety per cent of their ships' companies landmen—or landmen till a few months ago—the little ships, especially motor torpedo-boats and motor gunboats, were playing a gallant part against the enemy.

Almost at the last moment before sailing the situation was easier, so far as John was concerned. Unheralded and unexpected, two more sub-lieutenants of the "Wavy Navy" with a draft of twenty ratings reported for duty.

That, welcome though it was, meant an eleventh-hour alteration. Officers would still have to stand double watches—that was unavoidable—but the situation was considerably eased.

Sub-Lieutenant Norton was transferred to *Tur-*

pentine—to his entire satisfaction, as he was now shipmates with Trevor Hardy—and the newly joined subs told to report to Shorty Frazer for duty.

Almost to the minute the *Turpentine* cast off from her buoys on the Frankville river and, followed by her consort, headed slowly towards the open sea.

Departures of newly built vessels from Frankville were of common occurrence and generally attracted slight attention; but this was the first occasion that the products of this American shipyard had sailed under the White Ensign and manned by British crews.

American officers and men lined the wharves. Workmen temporarily abandoned their intensive tasks to join in the cheering that was taken up by crowds of townsfolk along the sea-front.

Then a hoist of brightly coloured bunting rose to the yard-arm of the signal mast ashore. The *Turpentine's* signalman was quick to interpret the message:

“ ‘From Commodore to O.C.s *Turpentine* and *Terebine*, safe voyage and may success be yours.’ ”

To which the reply was made, “Thank you for good wishes. Shall always remember with pleasure your hospitality.”

Then both ships increased speed, slowing down outside the bar to drop their pilots.

Once direct communication other than by wireless had been severed from the shore, John opened his sealed orders. These, he saw, were typed on paper bearing the crest of the American eagle and the heading Navy Department, U.S.A. They were

140 Operations Successfully Executed

but another instance of the co-operation existing between the British and American navies—that of a warship wearing the White Ensign taking orders from Washington.

He was to proceed coastwise to a position off Nantucket, where the two vessels would join an east-bound convoy and would then be under the orders of the commodore of that convoy. It added, significantly, that all necessary precautions were to be taken, as enemy submarines had again been reported as operating in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras.

This gave John food for thought. It was his first command of a vessel of the *Turpentine's* displacement. She wasn't a fast craft, her maximum speed being sixteen knots. She carried a valuable cargo in the shape of six midget submarines, resting on chocks and temporarily shored up and held down by chains to prevent their breaking adrift in a heavy seaway. If that did happen it would result in a catastrophe and heavy loss of life, since even one of these midgets, taking charge in the ship's hold, might easily force her side out and send her to the bottom.

Also he'd been warned against U-boat attacks. Both "tankers" provided huge targets. They were armed only with four dual-purpose quick-firers, hardly powerful enough to fight it out with the recently rearmed German under-water craft, whose defensive weapons had been increased both in range and hitting-power.

Then there were the usual perils of the sea, pre-

vailing under conditions both of peace and war. These were the risks that John was chiefly concerned with, for if anything happened to his ship he would be responsible. If she were lost and he were amongst the survivors he would have to stand a court-martial. Should his judges—impartial and implacable in their sense of duty—find him guilty of culpable negligence, then his hope of a successful career in the Royal Navy would be blighted.

John took over his responsibilities without dismay, but with enthusiasm. He was, however, a bit disappointed at being ordered to join a convoy. He'd hoped that he would be told to proceed by a more direct route, putting in at Bermuda and the Azores. Now that the latter had become an R.A.F. base and the waters between it and Britain were constantly patrolled by air and to a lesser degree by surface warships, it seemed as safe as the North Atlantic one—and not only considerably shorter but decidedly warmer.

It was at ten o'clock on the evening of the first day out that John came on the bridge for one of his many visits. It was a bright starry night. The sea was smooth, phosphorescent and with a long slight swell. From the height on which he stood the surface appeared almost flat. Twenty miles away on the port beam the coastwise lights of America's eastern seaboard could be seen. U-boats or no U-boats, the Yankee idea of a black-out seemed to be more honoured in the breach than in the observance.

Everything seemed peaceful, although he could

142 Operations Successfully Executed

just discern the muffled figures of the for'ard guns' crews sleeping beside their weapons. Except for the splash of the waves against the bows hardly a sound was audible. Even the steady rumble of the propeller shafts didn't reach the elevated bridge placed as it was so far for'ard, nor did the muffled beats of the exhausts from the powerful Diesel motors.

Yes, everything *seemed* peaceful enough, but at that very moment a U-boat commander, his attention attracted by the sound of the two British vessels' engines, might be manœuvring for position. The first intimation of danger—a warning often *too late*—the milky, phosphorescent wakes of a pair of torpedoes launched from an unseen U-boat perhaps a couple of miles away.

"Well, Sub!" he began, addressing Trevor Hardy. "How do you like the prospect of standing both the First and the Middle Watch?"

"I don't mind it in the least, sir," replied Hardy. "You see——" He paused irresolutely.

"See what?"

"I'm O.W. for the first time," he explained. "I put in twelve months in *Tremendous* as an A.B. before I went to *King Alfred* for my commission."

"*Tremendous*, eh? My old ship. Been in action in her?"

"No, sir," replied Hardy in a tone that suggested it was his own fault. "We never fired a single round except for gunnery practice the whole time I was in her. And never saw the track of a mouldie. I've often wondered—and it's been worrying me a

lot—what it feels like to be in action for the first time.”

It was an implied rather than a direct question. He had taken it for granted—and correctly—that Cloche had had plenty of experience of being under fire.

“It affects different men in different ways, Sub,” replied John. “From my own recollections it was before the enemy opened fire that was the rotten time. Gave me a nasty sinking sensation in my tummy, but that disappeared directly we got going. Mind you, I’m not one of those who enjoy being under fire—or rather say they do. A lot depends upon whether you’re in a position to hit back. Ever been bombed?”

“Yes, several times. I was in the Southampton blitz and was caught in one on London. That was before I entered the navy. While I was still at school, actually.”

“And what were your reactions then?” asked John, with a purpose and confident that he would receive a truthful, unboastful answer from his subordinate.

“Scared stiff, sir,” declared Trevor without hesitation. “There was nothing I could do but dive for a shelter.”

“And if you’d been in a destroyer and the Jerries were doing their best to plaster her with bombs,” continued John, mindful of similar experiences through which he had gone, “then you wouldn’t have been scared stiff. The reason, I think, is that you’d be one of a team that was hitting back hard,

144 Operations Successfully Executed

and probably giving more than it was taking."

"I think I see what you mean," rejoined Hardy.
"I hope you don't mind my bothering you?"

"Not in the least," replied John cheerfully. It was helping on the long double watch. "Anything else? If so, get it off your chest."

"How does it strike you, sir; all this mass-murder, the butchering of hundreds of thousands of men, woman and children? Why are creatures like Hitler allowed to exist?"

"Personally I don't blame Hitler for wanting power. The fault lies in the fact that his ambition didn't let him know how and where to stop. He was quite at liberty to make Germany great yet peaceable. It's the politicians of all the Allied nations who in 1918 and subsequent years allowed Germany to rearm, their supineness encouraged by Peace Pledge Unions and similar well-intentioned though utterly ill-advised bodies. If we make the same mistake after this war we'll have the same sort of thing—another world conflict—in about fifteen years' time."

"I suppose so," remarked Hardy. "When children of to-day are old enough to fight and numerous enough to fill the gaps caused by casualties in this war. I hope we'll muzzle Germany and Japan good and proper. All the same, I hope I'll get a transfer to the R.N."

John entertained similar hopes, but he kept them to himself. Instead he continued: "Somewhere in England I've a very small yacht. At least I hope I have, though I haven't seen her for goodness only

knows how long. I'm looking forward to the time when I can sail her again on a sea swept clear of mines, under a sky not streaked with the smoke trails of enemy aircraft, to wear clothes without having to give up coupons and to have plenty of provisions on board that require no rationing restrictions. Seems a bit self-centred, doesn't it? But it isn't really. It simply means that when these conditions are in existence everyone else in our Island will be free of the spectre of war and all the beastliness that goes with it.

"I've been lecturing to you like a Dutch uncle—whatever that may be. . . . Got your sextant handy? Right! Now, see that bright star on our port bow? You know its name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get the altitude and work out our latitude. You've got to keep your hand in with this sort of thing. You may want that knowledge badly before you're very much older."

CHAPTER XV

Christmas

Almost without incident the northward run was completed and *Turpentine* and her sister ship joined up with the eastbound convoy.

Across the Atlantic similar conditions prevailed. U-boats, worsted in their previous mass-attacks, had gone home—those that survived—to lick their

146 Operations Successfully Executed

wounds and the crews, despite risking severe penalties, to tell tales of hardship, frustration and mortal peril to their fellow-countrymen already dispirited by bad news from the Russian front and by the evidence of their own eyes, as they saw the utter devastation of their cities under the merciless pounding of the Allied bombers.

The sky, too, seemed clear of German aircraft, while the weather, though misty, was kind. No storms were encountered to disturb the peace of mind of the ship's company of the two "tankers".

! In fact, after *Turpentine* and *Terebine* had berthed in the Mersey, Shorty confided to his opposite number that it had been "money for jam", to which sentiment John expressed himself as being wholly in accord, adding that, with luck, they might be able to spend Christmas on leave at their respective homes.

"Christmas was then only five weeks off.

But no such luck!

The crews of both tankers were brought up to full strength. A "full-blown" captain, R.N., was appointed to each, which meant that Cloche and Frazer relinquished their brief former acting rank and reverted to the command of midget submarines. Other officers were appointed for service in the remaining ten craft, all of which had made the crossing in the holds of their respective carriers without sustaining the slightest damage, thanks to the kindness of the weather and the careful stowage. ∴ Then, refuelled and reprovisioned, *Turpentine* and *Terebine*, objects of unsatisfied curiosity to

thousands of Liverpudlians, proceeded down the Mersey for a secret destination.

The course even puzzled John.

It lay through the North Channel, then far out into the Atlantic, until the "buzz"—otherwise rumour—spread round the ships that they were to be based upon Iceland. Those on board who had served there in the earlier years of the war, including Cloche, were bombarded by their messmates with questions concerning what it was like on that ice-bound island that in two places lies within the Arctic Circle.

But a few miles east of Rockall, that small, elusive island which does not belie its name, course was altered to east by north.

Thirty hours later both vessels berthed at their base, *Loch Invercairn*, a deep inlet on the wild Caithness coast.

It wasn't a prepossessing spot, although in summer it might have compensations. Almost entirely enclosed by lofty hills, snow-covered for months at a stretch, cut off from everywhere by land except for a newly made motor road that wound its way through several miles of rough country occupied by the War Office for training purposes, the loch was nevertheless admirably suited in that it strongly resembled a certain Norwegian fiord. But with a difference. At Invercairn, when it wasn't snowing heavily or there wasn't a dense fog, one could rely on a few hours of daylight at this time of year. In the Norwegian fiord, lying as it did within the Arctic Circle, it was a period of perpetual gloom.

148 Operations Successfully Executed

Intensive training started almost at once. Crews, consisting of two officers and one rating, were allocated to each of the twelve midget submarines comprising the flotilla. After the usual and hardly necessary caution concerning secrecy had been given—for apart from the loyalty of the crews every man realized that an indiscreet sentence might result in his death—they were given a talk by a senior officer, known as Director of Operations, concerning the part they would undertake in the near future.

“*Tirpitz* can be ruled out,” he declared. “She’s unlikely to be repaired within a twelvemonth, and by that time she’ll have followed the traditional German custom in these circumstances by scuttling herself. The next one on the list is *Scharnhorst*, and since her sister ship *Gneisnau* had such a hammering at Brest by the R.A.F. and is considered to be permanently out of action, that leaves our old friend *Scharnhorst* the only remaining effective German battleship. You know what she’s like. You’ve seen plans and photographs of her. She’s lying at the head of the fiord, where the mountains close in to such an extent that torpedo bombers couldn’t get a smack at her and pull out in time to avoid colliding. So you—or some of you—will be given the task of winking her out. It’s not going to be easy—rather the reverse. You’ll operate in darkness but you may—may, I repeat—have the advantage of the *Aurora*, or *Northern Lights*, in case any of you don’t happen to know.”

He named other light German warships, includ-

ing the elusive *Prinz Eugen*, lying in northern Norwegian waters, and then proceeded:

“ Quite recently they have been joined by another and decidedly mysterious craft. Apparently she was constructed in a German Baltic yard and must have escaped the attentions of the R.A.F. when they went to Danzig and Gdynia. We’ve no particulars of her, beyond statements from Swedish correspondents reporting that she passed through the Sound under cover of darkness, and later, from Norwegian sources, that she was sighted going north between the Lofotens and the mainland. We don’t suppose she’s a battleship. She may be a new type of aircraft carrier or a large cruiser designed for use as a commerce destroyer. When her hide-out is located—and so far aerial reconnaissance has failed to do that—she’ll probably be No. 2 on your list, unless those bright lads of the R.A.F. scupper her first.”

Strenuous days lay ahead. Three times every week in groups of three the midget submarines, always working under cover of darkness, made dummy attacks upon their parent ship, thereby earning the soubriquet of “ The Matricides ”.

These operations were not devoid of risk even while under training. There were, for instance, three sharp bends in the loch between the starting-point of the attack and the objective, while eddies both on the flood and on the ebb had to be carefully taken into calculation.

Greatly to the satisfaction of both, John found that Trevor Hardy was appointed as his second-in-

150 Operations Successfully Executed

command. Although he kept a sharp watch on his immediate subordinate, John saw no signs of nervousness or apprehension about him. Hardy was "keen as mustard", harbouring few if any delusions concerning the nature of their forthcoming task.

The third member of the crew, stoker petty officer Job Joslin—known to his messmates as Joss-sticks—whose primary duty it was to manage the electric motors, was a sturdy Devon man of twenty-four.

In addition to diving operations, the crews of the midget submarines were obliged to perform physical exercises under the keen eye of the surgeon-commander. He, too, it was who decreed that his special charges were to be put on what he termed a "balanced diet".

"And sure ye'll not mind," he continued in a rich brogue, for like a good many naval surgeons he hailed from the Emerald Isle. "When Christmas is over ye'll be thanking me for not lettin' you have hobnailed livers."

So for at least two meals a day the submariners' diet included carrots, which the surgeon claimed to be excellent in assuring good eyesight at night. He also "dished out" some mysterious powder which he assured them also contributed to the same effect. He hastened, however, to point out that the taking of the drug was obligatory.

Most of the crews, including John, accepted the invitation. Whether it was owing to this powder, the "balanced diet" and prolonged hours training in darkness or not, the fact remained that night

vision improved tremendously in the course of a few weeks.

Sportsmanlike, the surgeon-commander also conformed rigidly to the same diet-sheet, but unfortunately a week before Christmas he stumbled over a ring-bolt in the darkness and broke his ankle.

"Och, bhoys!" he exclaimed, as he was being carried to his own sick bay, "it's not me eyesight that let me down. I was liftin' me eyes unto the heavens an' lettin' me feet take care of themselves. They just didn't!"

One afternoon Alan Mallett, John's former skipper, arrived, having made the journey from London to an airfield some thirty miles from Loch Invercairn by air and the remainder of the distance by car over the snowbound and slippery road.

He recognized John as he came over the side and shook hands.

"All well with you, I hope?" he inquired. "Splendid! Sorry I can't stop for a pow-wow, because I'm in rather a hurry!"

So it seemed, for after being with *Turpentine's* skipper for twenty minutes Mallett went ashore again on the first stage of his return journey.

"Surely," thought John, "there's something in the wind! He wouldn't make the round trip of a bit over a thousand miles just to wish the Owner a Merry Christmas!"

Whatever the object was, neither Commander Mallett nor the captain of the carrier let fall even a single word to indicate the subject or the nature of their brief exchange of views.

152 Operations Successfully Executed

Then Christmas Day; the fourth John had spent afloat in the service of his country. As he dressed in his cold cabin—for in spite of heating arrangements it was cold!—his mind went back to other recent Christmases. There was the one he spent at Singapore when the Japs had jubilantly announced their capture of Hong Kong. How low the fortunes of the British Empire seemed then, and what reasons for thankfulness there were on this Christmas Day with the tide of war turned definitely in favour of the Allied Nations!

Contrary to expectations there was a relaxation of routine. After breakfast there was a service on the quarter-deck—fortunately it was neither snowing nor raining and the planks had been swept clear of three inches of frozen snow that had fallen in the night.

They sang carols in the course of the service, which, in the absence of a chaplain, was conducted by the Owner. Everyone joined in with a will, the familiar tunes recalling visions of their families and friends. They sang whole-heartedly of "Peace on Earth" while the anti-aircraft guns' crews on board and those manning the sand-bagged emplacements on the bleak shore of the loch maintained a constant and vigilant look-out lest marauding Nazi aircraft swooped down without warning from the cover of those leaden skies.

When the hands were piped to dinner the captain, attended by most of the officers, made his customary round of the mess-decks. With only the meagre materials at their disposal the men had decorated

their messes. There was little holly, so they made some of the *ersatz* variety. Coloured paper made into chains owed its origin to strips cut from newspapers and dipped in ink of various hues. Samples from the well-laden tables were presented to the skipper and the officers as they made their way along the crowded mess-deck.

The *Turpentine* hadn't been commissioned long. The entire ship's company was under cast-iron restrictions and discipline each and every day except this one; but the spontaneous welcome given to the Owner—incidentally it was his thirty-fifth birthday—was an unmistakable indication that the crew regarded him not only as their captain but as a man upon whom they could rely in fair weather and foul and in the hazards of modern naval warfare.

In spite of the surgeon-commander's gloomy warnings the "specialists"—the crews of the midget submarines—had their usual Christmas fare. Later in the afternoon a tender with the mails put in a belated though none the less welcome appearance.

In the evening there was a concert on the mess-deck. Most of the items were markedly amateurish, but were received with the utmost enthusiasm. Like most ships' companies in wartime, with men recruited from all walks of life, H.M.S. *Turpentine* possessed professional "talent", and a special round of applause went up when a tall thin rating in "fore and aft" rig mounted the extemporized stage.

After a few rather clever conjuring turns he asked

154 Operations Successfully Executed

the skipper if he would kindly oblige with "letting him have" his cigarette case.

"Mind you, sir!" he added, "I'm not asking you to lend it. . . . Thank you very much, sir!"

There was almost complete silence as officers and men alike watched the many indignities to which the Owner's gold cigarette case was subjected.

He held it in the flame of a candle until it was blackened with soot. Then, placing a bucket of water on the stage, he called upon one of the audience to hold the case. The man did so—or, rather, attempted to do so—but the case being unpleasantly hot he let it drop into the bucket.

"Now look what you've done to the skipper's property," exclaimed the star turn. "Butterfingers, that's what you are! Someone's in the 'report' to-morrow over this. S'pose it'll be me, as usual! Now 'op it. You've done quite enough damage till next Christmas!"

The case had been at least thirty seconds under water before the conjurer retrieved it. He opened it. As he did so a trickle of water pattered on the boards.

"Do you happen to know, sir, how many cigarettes you had? They're soaked, anyway."

"I can't say for certain," replied the skipper, who was beginning to feel a bit anxious about his property—it was a presentation case. "Probably about fifteen!"

"We'll see, sir!" continued the demonstrator, holding up an almost pulped cigarette. "Here's one. . . . Catch, you chap!"

The cigarette was tossed to someone at the back of the audience. The others followed in quick succession, distributed amongst the crowd.

" . . . Thirteen . . . fourteen . . . fifteen . . . Perfectly correct, sir, in your estimate. Now, chaps, light up at our Owner's expense!"

Every one of the fifteen cigarettes apparently left the conjurer's hand in a sodden condition. The recipients, hardly able to believe the evidence of their eyes—and taste—found themselves lighting up and smoking perfectly good ones!

Next the conjurer placed the cigarette case on the stage, and picking up a pack of cards indulged in a little patter.

" 'E's goin' ter bite that pack in 'arves wuv 'is teeth," whispered a stoker in the third row. " Seen 'im do it on the 'Alls!"

But that display never came off, so far as the present performance was concerned; for happening to step back, the entertainer brought one boot—known to sailormen as one of a pair of " pusser's nines "—down upon the case, flattening it out of all resemblance.

There was a gasp from the audience. Even the skipper wore an anxious look. Officers sitting on either side turned and glanced at him to see how he would take it.

" Now I've done it!" exclaimed the conjurer in dolorous tones, holding up the battered article. " Can't say it just slipped out of my hand, can I? Must have had blinkers on my beetle-squashers and couldn't see where I was going."

156 Operations Successfully Executed

He placed the case in one of his pockets.

"Suppose you couldn't oblige with another cigarette case, sir. On loan this time."

"I haven't one here," replied the skipper.

"Just look in your right inside coat pocket, sir, if you please."

With unusual hesitation the Owner slid his hand gingerly to the required pocket. He would not have been greatly surprised if he'd found a white rabbit there—white rabbits being frequently one of the professional conjurer's stock in trade.

What he did find there was his cigarette case, intact even to its contents!

Amidst terrific rounds of applause the conjurer retired. He wouldn't respond to loud cries of "More, Lofty!" He preferred to make his turn short and snappy, which was more than many of the other performers did.

The next to appear was introduced as The Invercairn Wonder. He came on the stage hesitatingly. Even his disguise could not hide his identity from most of his shipmates, knowing the nature of his patter beforehand, encouraged him with shouts of "Let's see how far you can get with it, Taff!"

He commenced with several doubtful sallies concerning his messmates. They didn't appear to mind in the least having their own and other men's attention being drawn to their lapses, their peculiarities and their opinions. They applauded vociferously.

Encouraged, he made the junior officers the target for his wit. They, too, took it in excellent

part, although John as well as others thought he was cutting it a bit too fine.

Then he had a cut at the senior ship's surgeon over his encounter with the ring-bolt in the darkness, and Surgeon-Commander O'Malley, sitting next to the captain and with his injured leg, still in splints, supported on a low stool, seemed to enjoy the dubious joke as much as anyone.

Even the captain smiled and that, no doubt, encouraged Lofty Peters, A.B., to take the final plunge—to attempt to crack a joke at the expense of the present Arbiter of his Destiny, his skipper!

John went hot under his collar. So did a good many more of the audience, until the captain's face was wreathed in broad smiles as he led the roar of laughter.

Then, as the comedian retired, the ship's company swung to their feet and hailed the Owner with the rousing chorus of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

Thus honoured, the captain positively blushed. He raised a protesting hand, a gesture that in other circumstances would have made the ship's company subside into instant silence.

This time it didn't. It was Christmas Day when, within certain limits, whole-hearted sentiment takes the place of taut discipline.

Two more items and the concert was brought to a close by the singing of the National Anthem.

Next morning the customary wartime Sunday routine was observed as usual: morning Divisions, then prayers, followed by more inspection and still more exercises, that bore out the oft-quoted Seaman's

158 Operations Successfully Executed

Commandment: "Six days shalt thou labour and on the seventh work doubly hard!"

That wasn't the reason why John had been ordered away at 9 p.m. to make a dummy torpedo attack upon the parent ship. Time was an important consideration if *Scharnhorst* were to be caught in her lair. It was essential that this dummy attack should be carried out in darkness, and the moon didn't set before half-past eight that evening.

When, shortly before midnight, John brought back his midget command—she had been ordered to make fast alongside instead of entering her pen—he saw his two torpedoes, their practice heads crumpled with the impact, being secured by a party of the *Turpentine's* duty watch.

He felt rather pleased with his small craft, his crew and himself, for this was direct evidence that her torpedoes had scored hits on the target.

Men started to cheer. At first John thought they were applauding him. Then the cheering being taken up by the crew of *Terebine* convinced him that his estimate of his reception was without foundation. In any case, why were the Watch Below joining in the cheering? They should have been sound asleep well before midnight.

"What's up now?" he inquired of the officer of the watch.

"Signal just received," replied that worthy, with ill-restrained excitement. "Owner ordered it to be communicated to the ship's company. We've downed *Scharnhorst*, good and proper!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Chosen Three

John felt no sense of frustration as he had done, fleetingly, when he heard of the crippling of the *Tirpitz*.

"Some of ours?" he asked, meaning that midget submarines had brought about the destruction of Germany's last effective battleship.

"No," was the reply. "She came out to raid a convoy off the North Cape and fell into a trap. One of our capital ships engaged and sank her. That's all we know so far."

"And quite good news, too," rejoined John, as he made his way to the wardroom where, in spite of the lateness of the hour, a small crowd had collected to drink the health of the victors. This was also against regulations, the wardroom pantry being supposed to close at eleven. But one doesn't get the chance of celebrating the sinking of a German battleship every day! The sleepy messman didn't seem to mind being turned out of his hammock and—dash it all!—there was the Owner, glass in hand, in the middle of a knot of animated subordinates.

"We've still an alternative target!" he was saying when John joined the group. "That new light cruiser or whatever she is. Our reconnaissance aircraft haven't spotted her hide-out yet. But I can tell you this, now there is no longer any need for

160 Operations Successfully Executed

secrecy. Our attack on *Scharnhorst* was fixed for the evening of New Year's Eve. Now she's accounted for, some of you, who wouldn't be here otherwise, will hear Sixteen Bells struck."

That was the Navy's way of putting it that, the enemy and other circumstances permitting, those midget submarine crews who would have been engaged in a decidedly hazardous operation on New Year's Eve would be on board their parent ship. For to mark the birth of the New Year custom and tradition of the Royal Navy enjoin that the hour of midnight shall be announced by sixteen strokes on the ship's bell instead of the usual eight. Of these the first half are rung by the youngest man in the ship and the other eight by the senior in point of age.

Someone thrust a glass into John's hand. He stood by listening, since a junior officer doesn't enter into conversation conducted by seniors who by virtue of their rank wear gilt oak-leaves on their uniform caps.

"Poor devils didn't stand an earthly. Nine eleven-inch guns against our capital ship's fourteen, perhaps, sixteen-inch ones!"

"Wonder if there are survivors. Under heavy shell-fire and then being thrown into icy cold water, you know. Makes one feel sorry for the Hun."

"Blest if I am!" declared the commander dourly.

"They asked for it. If our ships hadn't been there she would have played havoc with the convoy. It's like a pike in a trout pond. I've seen survivors from our torpedoed merchant vessels—some picked up

after being weeks adrift in the Tropics, others half frozen after days in open boats in Arctic waters, and some who weren't survivors."

"Fritz always was a dirty fighter," said the engineer-commander. "His U-boats started sinking unarmed merchantmen in the last war without giving the crews a chance to get away in the boats. And there were cases of sinking without trace. We were fools enough to let them have a navy, especially U-boats."

"We?" echoed the commander. "The politicians, you mean!"

"I wonder if *Scharnhorst* was polished off by gunfire or by torpedo," remarked the Owner, heading off what looked like being a prolonged and heated argument between his two subordinates upon a subject having no direct bearing upon Germany's latest loss.

"She wouldn't take as long as it took to put *Bismarck* down, sir," opined "Guns". "You saw the end of that action, I believe, Seven Bells?"

"What, you there, Cloche?" inquired the captain, turning and catching sight of him. "Don't worry him to spin that yarn now. He's only just returned from night ops. And you did remarkably well: both torpedoes hit. You needn't send in your report before eleven to-morrow—or to-day, rather. And I think it's time for all of us to pipe down, or there'll be some fat heads when it's 'show a leg and shine'!"

Although the New Year's Eve "show" was definitely off, there was no relaxation so far as train-

162 Operations Successfully Executed

ing went. In subdivisions of three—that being the number decided upon for each distinct attack—the midget submarines were put through their paces until each crew worked like a well-balanced team and faults were cut down to a bare minimum.

All the same, John Septimus Cloche was feeling a trifle worried. Perhaps it was due to the fact that he had Gallic blood in his veins, one of his remote forebears being a Huguenot who had settled in Norwich after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

It had nothing to do with his present duties; it was on account of someone whom he'd wished he'd never set eyes upon.

That was *Ober-leutnant* Hans Schenk, *alias* Oscar G. Harboard, who was being held by the U.S. Federal Authorities on a charge of espionage.

John thought he'd finished with the fellow when H.M.S. *Turpentine* left United States territorial waters, since from that moment there was no likelihood of being made to appear at Washington as a witness for the prosecution.

It didn't improve matters, so far as he was concerned, when one morning the twenty-four-hours-old daily papers arrived, giving the news that the British Government had requested the U.S. Government that Hans Schenk should be sent to London for trial, not only on charges of espionage but of sabotage.

"That's what they hinted to me at Frankville," John confided to Shorty Frazer. "It's rotten being mixed up with it. I hope to goodness something

happens to let us get a move on with the thing that matters most."

Not long after, his wish was gratified.

British reconnaissance aircraft had located Germany's latest cruiser—her name wasn't known—lying in the head of a fiord some thirty miles southwest of Alten Fiord from which the *Scharnhorst* had emerged to fight her last fight.

Talvik Fiord was the name of the cruiser's hideout. It was a deep, narrow inlet running roughly at right angles to Alten Fiord and with mountains rising sheer from the water's edge to about six thousand feet.

Air photographs showed the vessel to be moored close to the shore, with a couple of large lighters—or they might be pontoons—separating her from the narrow beach, these serving as direct means of communication between the ship and the beach. Close by were four long wooden buildings—probably storehouses or shore quarters for some of the crew. At a greater distance were other buildings, doubtless used for the storage of ammunition and oil-fuel.

The photographs were by no means up to the usual high standard set by the R.A.F., but it was explained that owing to the nature of the surrounding high ground the aircraft was unable to fly at less than six thousand feet or she would have been unable to clear the mountain tops. Also, since it is particularly dark at this time of year, apart from the difficulty in locating the target, the negatives had to be obtained by the aid of flares.

164 Operations Successfully Executed

This, no doubt, made the Germans uneasy. In the depths of an Arctic winter they probably thought themselves safe in this narrow fiord. They had been neatly tricked, for Norwegian patriots, running immense risks, had given the cruiser's position to the British Admiralty by means of a secret radio station.

Undoubtedly it must have been something in the nature of a shock when the crew of the Nazi warship saw the snow-covered mountains and the placid waters of the fiord lighted up by the dazzling flares.

The photographs showed that the hide-out was one of a temporary nature, while the barracks indicated that the cruiser carried an unusually large complement, so that when she was not out on operations, the congestion could be relieved by arranging for some of the ship's company to live ashore.

That indication led to others.

The cruiser might be used in attempts to attack the North Russian convoys, but the number of her crew pointed to the probability that she would be used out in the Atlantic as a fast commerce-raider, capturing unescorted ships and sending them with prize crews on board into German and German-occupied ports. It would be a risky business and the number of prizes brought in would be small in proportion to those captured. From the Nazi point of view it was well worth trying, since it entailed less risk than did the long voyages made by German blockade runners between Japan and the Biscayan ports. Latterly that enterprise had been most discouraging to the German High Command. Modern

cargo ships carrying much-needed rubber and other war material from the Far East had nearly completed their protracted and hazardous voyage only to be sent to the bottom almost within sight of their port of destination.

Skilfully and, everything considered, in a surprisingly short while preparations were completed for the attack.

Three midget submarines only were to be employed, and these were to be detailed from *Turpentine*, a decision that caused much gnashing of teeth on the part of her sister ship, designed to lie idly at her moorings in Loch Invercairn while her "opposite number" stood a chance of distinguishing herself in the reflected light of her "offspring's" glory.

Each crew of the *Turpentine's* midgets volunteered to make the attack, until the director of operations decided the matter by drawing the numbers out of a hat.

The three lucky ones were Nos. 41, 45, and 49.

The first was John's craft. The second Shorty Frazer drew. No. 49 also fell to one of the original *Sulphurous* crowd, a stocky Londoner who in civil life was "something in the City" and who answered cheerfully to the name of Mumps, although in the Navy List it appeared as John William Loveless.

The lucky three from that time onward were practically segregated. To them alone of all the submarine's commanding officers were revealed the inner secrets of the plan of operations relating to the actual attack.

166 Operations Successfully Executed

Briefly the *Turpentine*, with but three midgets penned in her submersible hold, was to proceed to a position thirty miles from the mouth of Alten Fiord. She would be escorted by destroyers, while some ten miles farther to seaward two cruisers, also with destroyer screen, would be standing by. Capital ships were no longer required in these waters. The liquidation of the *Scharnhorst* had done away with the need of 14-inch-gun battleships on operations of this nature. What remained of Germany's surface warships wouldn't come out to face the guns of the two modern British cruisers—not even the Nazis' latest addition to their dwindling navy, the vessel skulking in Talvik Fiord.

Having emerged from their parent ship, the attacking midgets were to proceed on the surface, though prepared to dive at a few moments' notice, to a position five miles from the entrance to Alten Fiord. From there onward they must "smell their way" submerged, by compass course and by rising at intervals to periscope depth.

"There are no reports so far of the enemy setting up coastal defences in Talvik Fiord, although we know that Alten Fiord is protected by guns and mines," continued the briefing officer in one of the preliminary instructional talks. "Whether these have been augmented since they've lost *Scharnhorst* is a matter for speculation. You'd better take it for granted that they have. It's well to take precautions against dangers that may not exist.

"Once inside Alten Fiord you will not use radio communication with the supporting craft. That is

important. Only when you are on your return run and are outside the Fiord may you do so, and then only if absolutely necessary.

"Having sighted your target, you will attack in line ahead. No. 1, having discharged his torpedoes, will make a sixteen-point turn to starboard. No. 2 will execute a similar alteration of helm turning to starboard, leaving No. 3 a comparatively clear field. It is not anticipated that you will be depth-charged in Talvik Fiord, but there is that possibility in the lower reaches of the main fiord. In that case you may expect assistance from our own destroyers.

"There will be no moon on the night fixed for the operations. It would have been a hindrance rather than an aid if it were visible. High water on the day fixed for the attack is at 1500 and at 1530 on the following morning. There will be a rise of six feet. I mention this just in case you pick up a shoal patch one cable inside Talvik Fiord.

"One more point: if, unhappily, you are scuppered while submerged, it'll be a quick call. On the other hand, if you can surface and can get away in your collapsible dinghy, close the hatch of your craft if you can. The pressure of water will do the rest and Jerry won't find the wreckage worth fishing up. Make for the open sea and you'll stand a chance of being spotted by some of our light craft. If not, make for this part of the shore"—indicating the position on the chart—"and you'll probably find Norwegian fishermen ready and willing to help you. Otherwise there's the dismal prospect of becoming prisoners of war. I sincerely hope that none of these

168 Operations Successfully Executed

possibilities will materialize and that you will all return safely and in the knowledge that you have achieved success—an outstanding success against the enemy!”

CHAPTER XVII

Nosing into the Fiord

In the growing shades of a January night, H.M. “Tanker” *Turpentine* left her anchorage in Loch Invercairn, bound for Arctic waters.

There were no demonstrations, no “cheering ship”. Like a thief in the night she crept down the sheltered haven, then, increasing speed, was soon plunging in the long Atlantic swell.

Ten miles to the west'ard of Foula, that outpost of the Shetlands, a light flashed spelling out two letters in Morse. It was the challenge of the destroyers detailed for the carrier's escort.

Promptly—for delay in such circumstances might easily result in death and destruction—the *Turpentine's* yeoman of signals sent the correct reply.

Five miles off her opposite number reported to the destroyer's captain—“Challenge correctly answered, sir!” Then, in obedience to a general signal, the flotilla spread fanwise, taking up station to screen their particular charge.

Under the protection of the destroyers the *Turpentine* was almost as secure as if she were lying in Loch Invercairn. No U-boat would willingly find

herself within range of the modern detectors of the escort ships. She would have all her work cut out in a desperate and usually futile effort to escape the ensuing deadly depth-charges. As for enemy aircraft, the length of the hours of darkness, combined with hazy atmospheric conditions, reduced their sphere of usefulness to the minimum.

Three hours after falling in with the destroyers, *Turpentine* made contact with the two cruisers and the first phase of the operations was successfully accomplished.

Although John Cloche was willing to admit that he felt a bit excited he was fortunate in being able to sleep and eat well during the northward run. Probably his fellow-adventurers were similarly fortunate, but it was a noticeable fact that they were remarkably reluctant to indulge in ordinary conversation, confining their remarks to guarded references to the big task that lay ahead.

They wouldn't have been out of it for anything, but they quite realized the hazardous nature of their collective tasks. The comparative tediousness of the voyage seemed to irritate them; they wanted to go in and get on with the job with the least possible delay.

When they were neither sleeping nor eating, the crews of the midgets put in most of their time on board their respective craft that were lying firmly secured to the chocks in the ship's hold. The hold itself, designed to accommodate nine pocket submarines—and twelve at a pinch—looked vast and cavernous with only three!

170 Operations Successfully Executed

For his part John carefully went over the controls perhaps for the twentieth time, checking this and that, testing various gadgets, but without detecting even the slightest fault. The while Trevor Hardy, as second-in-command, followed John round on his limited tour of inspection—there wasn't much room to spread themselves out!—like a faithful spaniel.

"Joss-sticks", the third member of the crew, put in several hours with oil-can and greasy rag, attending, almost needlessly, to the now silent electric motors.

Before leaving the loch, the torpedoes had been struck below and were now housed in their respective tubes. They too were ready. It required but the depressing of a lever to release any one torpedo from its tube. Between them the midgets carried six such sinister weapons, each with a deadly war-head containing some hundreds of pounds of one of the most powerful explosives the scientists have produced for the destruction of their fellow-men.

Fifteen minutes ahead of schedule *Turpentine* arrived at her appointed station.

It wasn't a cheerful outlook as John stood on the lower bridge and took in the general scene. There was no sign of the Norwegian coast—not even a pinprick of light from anywhere. Even the screening destroyers were vague shapes in the brief northern twilight.

"Time we fell in, Seven Bells!" declared Shorty in a low voice. "The Owner's going to inspect the crews."

The two chums clattered down the ladder, and joined the others drawn up under the for'ard part of the spar deck.

In quiet, resolute tones the captain spoke. Since all preparations had been made he wasn't going to refer to the magnitude of the task ahead; but he wished them God-speed and a safe return following the successful carrying out of their enterprise.

Then, after shaking hands with every officer and man of the expedition, he stood watching the hold where their little craft fretted as if eager to be up and doing.

Already the huge doors aft were open and long undulations from the sea without were imparting a distinct liveliness to the three midgets, whose mooring ropes were being tended by men detailed for that purpose.

"Watch your step, Hardy!" cautioned John, as the sub-lieutenant prepared to descend the rope ladder to the deck of No. 41, whither Joslin had already preceded him.

"Aye, aye, Skipper!" replied Hardy. "I'll watch out. It would never do to let you down at this stage of the proceedings."

"Nor at any," added John, as he followed with the case containing the confidential orders and other documents.

These papers as well as the necessary charts had already been treated with chemicals, so that in the event of the midget submarine being "scuppered" they would quickly be reduced to pulp. Should the enemy be successful in raising the wreck—and that

172 Operations Successfully Executed

depended greatly upon the depth in which she was lying—one of the greatest prizes they so ardently desired would be denied them.

Without mishap, although there was a considerable sea running, No. 41 got under way, followed by No. 45. The third midget experienced some difficulty, and it was not until the third attempt that she rejoined her consorts.

Although they were to make the first stage of the run on the surface, waves surging over the low free-board made it out of the question for the midgets to be navigated from the deck. All hands had to keep below, the conning-tower hatch being secured to prevent water finding its way into the interior of each little craft.

"You'd better take her," John suggested, rather than ordered, to his second-in-command. "I'll relieve you when we make the entrance to Alten Fiord. One two-o degrees and she's steady now!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!" replied Hardy gratefully, stepping up to the steering wheel and glancing at the faintly illuminated compass.

It wasn't that John didn't want to take the helm, but he knew that by giving his subordinate something both useful and important to do, Hardy's mind would be fully occupied. He wouldn't have the chance to brood over things during the comparatively monotonous "run-up" to the danger zone.

In two and a quarter hours after leaving the *Turpentine* Hardy reported land on both port and starboard bows—mountain peaks, snow-covered

and showing distinctly in the wan light of the aurora borealis.

"Right—we're nearly there," observed John. "Didn't reckon with the Northern Lights. Bit of a nuisance! I'll take her now."

He glanced astern. Two ghostly white patches indicated that the other midgets were keeping station. Their bow-waves, if they held on much longer on the surface, would give them away to watchers ashore.

"No. 41, calling 45 and 49—are you receiving me?" inquired John through the low-power radio telephone—a medium that could be used with safety although wireless communication with their parent ship was taboo.

"No. 45 receiving you."

"All O.K., Lofty?"

"Fine!"

"Good. I'm diving to periscope depth."

Having received a similar assurance from Mumps Loveless, John gave Joslin the order to turn, and to the accompaniment of the hiss of inrushing water, as liquid ballast was admitted to one of the buoyancy tanks, No. 41 submerged until only a foot or so of the tip of her periscope remained above the surface.

"Remained" could hardly be the correct term, for the box-like tip of the periscope was being constantly immersed as the waves swept over it.

Presently the "pumping"—as the vertical motion of the submarine submerged in a big sea is termed—grew less as the sheltered waters of the fiord were reached. Had the enemy laid mines in the approach

174 Operations Successfully Executed

channel? Had he obtained information that British naval units were in the offing, and was he in consequence patrolling the lower reaches of Alten Fiord?

Away on the starboard bow there was something under way—something moving fairly fast, judging by the bow-wave, close under the precipitous cliffs.

"I hope to goodness it's not the cruiser we're after," thought John, then stepping back he spoke aloud: "Have a look-see, Hardy, and see what you make of that."

Hardy did so and gave a low whistle.

"Something big, sir. She'll miss us."

"If I thought she wouldn't, we'd dive pretty quickly," rejoined John, urging his second-in-command aside and resuming his place at the periscope. "My error! It's not one craft, but four in line ahead! Yes, four foolish Fritzes running on the surface!"

"Going to attack, sir?" asked Hardy in an excited voice that John didn't like the sound of. A clear brain and a steady pulse were what was required.

It was a tempting proposition. All the midgets had to do was to make an eight-point turn to starboard and the *Unterseebooten*, each separated from the one next ahead and astern by about its own length, would cross their bows at a distance of six hundred yards—an ideal range.

But John had to turn the proposition down. He had his orders to carry out a definite operation. He'd have to let the unsuspecting U-boats hold on.

Quite possibly they were on their way to deliver an attack upon the *Turpentine*, although they would have to reckon with the destroyer screen.

He couldn't even warn the British craft by wireless since he had strict injunctions not to use that means of communication while within the limits of the fiord.

But again, perhaps the U-boats weren't looking for trouble, but were out only to stage a purely imaginary victory. Only a couple of days or so after the sinking of the *Scharnhorst* the German wireless gave out, not only to home listeners but to British as well, flamboyant descriptions of a brilliant naval victory in the Bay of Biscay. Two British cruisers were heavily damaged, six destroyers sunk, and others so hit by U-boats' torpedoes that there was every reason to assume their total loss! This announcement was preceded by fanfares and the singing of "We're Marching against England!"

And the facts: two British cruisers had engaged enemy destroyers, more numerous, with greatly more gun and torpedo power and possessing superior speed. The Nazi destroyers dispersed. Some were brought to action, three being sunk for certain. Our ships received only slight damage and there was but one casualty.

So badly was Hitler in need of a success to bolster up the spirits of the Germans that he had gone to the length of inventing one.

In blissful ignorance of the fact that they might be blown sky-high without warning, the U-boats continued on their way.

176 Operations Successfully Executed

The midget submarines did not.

Knowing that the U-boats must have come through a channel in the mine-fields—that is, if mines had been laid in *Alten Fiord*—John ordered an eight-point turn to starboard until the track of the enemy craft had been cut. Then, following their wake in the reverse direction, the midget held on until the narrow entrance to *Talvik Fiord* bore broad on their starboard beam.

Another five miles to go!

CHAPTER XVIII

The Touchstone of Peril

It was a fearsome-looking stretch of narrow waterway. The bluish-black cliffs, mottled in places where snow had the chance of settling, appeared to overhang the narrow channel. They made the waterway look narrower than it actually was. The reflections of the mountains were mirrored upon the surface of the placid water.

With a few quick-firers, a boom with depth-charges suspended underneath, and a battery of searchlights trained down the cimmerian canyon from the head of the fiord, the Germans could have made the cruiser's hide-out proof against attack from the sea.

Perhaps some if not all of these precautions had been taken, but so far, peering intently into the

object bowl of the periscope, John could see nothing, such as an unscreened light, to indicate any defence—nothing but a void of darkness through which direction could be maintained only by watching the compass and judging the distance between the cliffs on either hand.

A low rumble caught John's ears—a confused throbbing distinct from the subdued noise of the midget submarine's electric engine.

"Down to sixty feet!" he ordered, muttering under his breath: "Hope to goodness the others have heard it. What is it—destroyer or E-boat?"

The thrashing sound rapidly grew louder and louder.

John glanced apprehensively at the needle of the depth-gauge. It was steady at fifty feet—a sufficient margin if the suction of the approaching craft did not whip the midget towards the surface. If she did, then her sharp forefoot would do the rest. . . .

Why hadn't Joss-sticks brought her down that extra ten feet that might mean all the difference between safety and disaster?

A few seconds later and the surface craft passed, seemingly directly overhead.

No. 41, caught in the slipstream of her twin propellers, behaved like a bucking broncho—rolling, plunging, but never once coming within thirty feet of the surface.

White-faced and with every nerve taut, John waited. For the moment he had no apprehensions concerning his command; he was deeply anxious

178 Operations Successfully Executed

about what might happen to his two consorts astern and in line ahead.

Half a minute later the noise of the enemy craft's propellers was decidedly dying away in the distance. That of the other two midget subs could again be heard.

They had submerged and the German destroyer, unsuspecting their presence, had steamed overhead well clear of them.

All the same, John didn't feel any too happy. The disquieting thought, "What is she doing?" flashed across his mind. What was her object in proceeding down the fiord? Was it just a routine patrol or had the Huns received a warning of an impending attack?

Again he looked at the depth-gauge. The needle was hovering around sixty. He decided to remain at that depth for a while, steering solely by compass.

"Why didn't she dive to sixty?" he inquired.

"Don't know, sir," replied Joslin. "Hydro-plane stuck up, I reckon. She's all right now. . . . How much farther, sir?"

"Two miles."

It was a rough guess, but John hoped that it was fairly accurate. Very soon they'd have to come up to periscope depth to make a "look-see". He couldn't expect to see much but it might be possible to check distance and course.

Then somewhere from for'ard came the disconcerting noise of metal rasping against metal, the sound magnified inside the concave hull.

Again beads of perspiration oozed from John's

forehead. He hadn't had anything like that before but he'd been warned against it.

No. 41 was pushing her way past the wire mooring to a mine. Provided the wire didn't foul any part of the submerged craft all might be well. If she did the cylindrical mine would be forced against her hull, and it required only the bending of one of the eight "horns" to result in a shattering explosion and the instant and total destruction of the midget and her crew.

Even if by little short of a miracle the major disaster were averted, there remained the grave risk that the propeller, although protected by guards, would foul the wire.

Waiting, John had a mental picture of a notice posted up in a railway station. It asked pointedly: "Is your journey really necessary?"

This one certainly was, but across his mind flashed another question prompted by the first. "Is submarine warfare really necessary?" At best, allowing for the glorious achievements of The Trade, it was a sneaking and literally underhand business. After the war was over couldn't the victors agree amongst themselves totally to abolish the submarine—a weapon that Germany had put to the basest uses by the torpedoing without warning of unarmed merchant craft and even—the lowest depths of infamy—of hospital ships for which the International Red Cross was no protection?

"We're clear!"

Hardy's voice jerked his superior officer back to present realities. Trevor's face looked pale, but he

180 Operations Successfully Executed

spoke in a tone that betrayed no apprehension but only relief. It reminded John of the driver of a car that had just missed a dog!

"We are," replied John, but he kept the rest of the sentence to himself. Mines are hardly ever moored singly. The next encounter might turn out not so innocuous.

In point of fact, though none of the crews was aware of it, the enemy had laid no mines in Talvik Fiord, although they had done so in Alten Fiord. The wire was attached to a mark-buoy over the wreck of a small supply ship that a few days earlier had been sunk in collision. And, again unknown to them, the temporary failure of No. 41 to dive to the required depth had averted disaster. Had she descended to the full sixty feet she would have crashed into the sunken wreckage. As it was she cleared it with less than thirty inches to spare, while equally happily, Nos. 45 and 49, having edged slightly to starboard, had also cleared the unseen and unexpected danger.

Three times John brought his craft up to periscope depth without sighting anything but encompassing, towering cliffs.

At the fourth attempt what he saw gave him an exultant thrill.

The aurora was giving another display. It couldn't have been better timed, for in the glow he could distinctly make out the enemy cruiser, her grey hull visible against the background of the sombre mountain-side.

So far as he could judge, she was about half a

mile off—a sitting target that nothing short of mechanical defect to all six torpedoes could possibly miss.

In tones of suppressed elation, John ordered Hardy to report to the other submarines: "Target on—am attacking now!" To Joslin he added: "Down to thirty feet!"

Before the order could be executed flashes came from the enemy cruiser. She had opened up with her quick-firers.

Now perfectly cool and collected, John pressed the trigger operating the starboard tube. There was a muffled hiss and a perceptible jerk as the powerful missile left the tube. Five seconds later the port tube unleashed the second and last torpedo.

Down below the required depth No. 41 submerged. Under full helm she began her semi-circular turn to starboard. Protected by thirty feet of water, she was safe from the shells that were bursting overhead with reports resembling the rapid but irregular beats of a drum.

A seemingly interminable period followed. Hardy, his eyes fixed on his wrist-watch, was counting the seconds aloud.

"Forty-five . . . forty-six . . ."

"Dashed long seconds," thought John. "Greenwich 'pips' are a jolly sight quicker!"

"Forty-nine . . . fifty . . . fifty—ah!"

A deep muffled *boom*, clearly distinguishable above the clamour of the shell bursts, announced that the first torpedo had exploded. This was quickly followed by another.

182 Operations Successfully Executed

"Got her! Smack on the solar plexus!" shouted Hardy. "Shake, sir!"

John, equally elated, extended a hot and slightly shaking paw, and then resumed his all-important task of getting his craft on the reverse compass course. An error of even one degree might result in running her ashore.

A few minutes later two more heavy explosions, with only two seconds interval between them, indicated beyond the shadow of a doubt that No. 45's torpedoes had gone off—against the side of the enemy cruiser it was to be hoped.

Then two more. The little flotilla had carried out its task. Now it must seek and find safety if it could!

The German cruiser's fire had ceased. John determined to have a look at the result of the attack.

He brought his craft up to periscope depth. Previously there had been very little light. Now the head of the fiord was brilliantly illuminated. Like Piccadilly Circus before the war, thought John.

The enemy vessel was well down by the head. Her fo'c'sle was under water and she had a heavy list to starboard. That part of her as yet not submerged was a mass of flames shooting high into the air.

"Here! quick!" invited John, stepping back and beckoning Hardy to the periscope bowl.

"Not much doubt about that, sir!" was the sub-lieutenant's comment, while Joslin, bidden

to have a quick look-see, exclaimed: "Cor! We've got something to write home about this time!"

They were a long way from home—even from their parent ship—and there was no means of writing. Instead some twenty miles of intricate fiords and about the same distance of open sea separated No. 41 and her consorts from the *Turpentine*. Much of the way lay through heavily defended waters covered by shore batteries and patrolled by destroyers and E-boats.

Again John bewailed the order that forbade the use of wireless telegraphy while inside the limits of Alten Fiord. He could see no reason why, now that the enemy cruiser had been destroyed and the Germans knew that British submarines had carried out the attack and were on their way back, information should not be sent.

If all three midget submarines failed to return, the world and particularly the relatives of the crews concerned might never learn of the circumstances under which their combined action achieved its object. On the face of it, the Silent Navy could be on occasion unnecessarily silent!

But in the Service an order is an order and must be obeyed. It would be decidedly unhealthy for an officer, taking Nelson's example at Copenhagen, to neglect that rule.

Now, running on the surface but ready to dive at a moment's notice, No. 41 and No. 45 held on their course down Talvik Fiord. There they were comparatively safe from attack, except from naval

184 Operations Successfully Executed

units, since the steepness of the cliffs prevented the enemy establishing shore batteries.

Some five miles ahead, however, searchlights were sweeping the wide surface of Alten Fiord, and it was on this stretch of landlocked water that danger threatened most.

Presently Hardy touched John on the shoulder.

"Sorry, Skipper," he announced. "No. 45's just phoned; they've lost touch with 49."

"See if you can contact, then," rejoined John, peering into the periscope bowl, since he could not look astern except through the hatch, now hermetically sealed.

In the darkness he could just discern the misty white splash of the next astern's bow wave and nothing more.

Then Hardy reported that he had tried to call up No. 49 but without success.

Her electric motor might have broken down. She might have fouled some obstruction while submerged or, getting off her course, might have piled herself up on the rocks. No explosion had been heard from the time when she had successfully fired her torpedoes, so that ruled out all possibility of her being attacked by depth-charges.

Obviously misfortune had overtaken Mumps Loveless and his crew. Nor could their consorts render any assistance; for orders had been issued in connexion with the operation that in the event of one or two submarines becoming disabled while within the limits of the two fiords the other—or others—must carry on in execution of previous orders.

This seemed pretty grim and totally different from the traditions and customs of the Royal Navy, but John realized that there could be no other justifiable course apart from acting in flagrant disobedience of orders; it would be futile to search for the missing midget in the darkness. She might be submerged—probably for all time—or she might be lying awash and unable to indicate her position by displaying a light. Evidently her wireless telephone had “packed up”—another ominous sign.

A couple of swift surface craft approaching caused the two submarines to dive hurriedly. They approached abreast—another ominous sight—and were taking up almost the entire breadth of the narrow waterway.

“I’ll bet they’re towing an explosive sweep,” thought John.

Evidently they were, for a moment later No. 41 shuddered under the concussion of an explosion not less than a hundred yards away.

The explosion meant safety—temporarily, perhaps—for the span between the two enemy vessels had fouled some obstruction on the bed of the fiord.

Their quarry, unharmed, passed unseen and unheard through the gap left by the shattered sweep.

At length the two hunted craft reached the junction of the two fiords. They were now submerged to eighty feet under a wide stretch of search-light-flooded water.

186 Operations Successfully Executed

Again, on John's orders, Hardy called up No. 45, hoping that the enemy hadn't means of picking up the short-range message:

"Suggest we part company. Am proceeding *up* the fiord before making a dash for the open sea."

To which Shorty Frazer replied with characteristic levity: "O.K. See you later! This station is now closing down until seven to-morrow morning, when we shall start our programme with the News followed by 'The Daily Dozen'!"

Thus and in similar strain do men of our race jest even within sight of the touchstone of peril.

John Cloche had made a sound decision. He had assumed that the search for him would be hottest between the mouth of the subsidiary Talvik Fiord and the sea. By keeping close in-shore and turning *up* Alten Fiord, where the hunters would not be expecting him, he could then cross to the other side, still submerged, and nose his way down almost under the muzzles of the shore batteries. There the water was sufficiently shallow to enable his craft to lie doggo on the bottom should need arise, leaving the German destroyer to depth-charge the deep channel. By so doing he could conserve the electric batteries, which he could not do had he to double all over the fiord like a hunted hare.

"And a sorry plight we'd be in," he thought, "if the juice gave out and we had to surface, only to be put down by the first Hun that came that way."

Midget submarines, built for particular operations,

were not only comparatively lightly constructed, but they carried no defensive armament.

Running by guess, since it would be suicidal to expose the tip of the periscope in that flood-lit area, No. 41 rounded the bluff and followed a new compass course for about a couple of miles up the main fiord.

Heavy concussions seawards indicated that the Germans were systematically depth-charging the lower stretch of the fiord in a determined effort to avenge their latest loss.

"I hope old Shorty's dodging it," thought John; for somewhat remarkably he had temporarily forgotten the dangers that must inevitably beset him and his crew when they attempted their breakthrough.

So far they were having a comparatively quiet spell. Their skipper's decision to run up the fiord had proved a success—up to the present.

Finding a shoal with twelve fathoms over it—assuming that the echo-sounder recordings after allowances for the submarine's depth below the surface had been made—John ordered the supplementary ballast tank to be flooded.

With hardly a perceptible jar, No. 41, her motors switched off, rested on the bottom of the fiord. Everything seemed quiet. Depth-charging and gunfire had ceased.

"We'll hang on here for an hour," decided John. "Give things a chance to settle down properly."

All the same, it was a nerve-racking sixty minutes. Inaction seemed almost as trying as being hunted.

188 Operations Successfully Executed

The three men hardly exchanged a word. To pass the time John tried to write a letter. Hardy, wishing to appear to be unconcerned, pretended to read a book, but by the way he skipped the pages it was evident that his mind was dwelling on other things. Joslin, sucking at an empty pipe (since smoking on board was entirely out of the question), was actually concentrating on a cross-word puzzle in a fortnight-old Sunday paper, but even he glanced frequently at the bulkhead clock whose minute hand moved with such exasperating slowness.

"Stand by," ordered John. "Start her up, Joss-sticks! We'll have to come up to periscope depth to get our bearings."

Very cautiously the tip of the periscope emerged. There were no surface craft to be seen and no gun-flashes. Farther down the fiord, however, and on the side John had decided to take, a group of searchlights were playing.

Getting a bearing—one that would take the little craft close under the searchlight positions—John took her down to ten fathoms once more. Unless the chart were wrong, this would still give him another five fathoms in which he could play about.

For two long hours the dash for the open sea continued, during which the periscope had to be exposed eight times.

Good fortune *plus* sound judgment had their reward. Right under the searchlight beams that were coming from projectors eighty to a hundred feet above sea-level, the little craft made her way unmolested. The Germans were concentrating

their attention to the centre of the channel, all unsuspecting that their quarry was practically under their noses!

At length, after the periscope had been up for the ninth time during this stage of the proceedings, John stepped aside and signed to Hardy to relieve him.

"We're out, old son!" he announced to his second-in-command. "Take over, will you? It's safe to run awash now, I think, but keep your weather-eye lifting!"

CHAPTER XIX

"Successfully Carried Out"

Running on the surface and with her diminutive White Ensign now streaming proudly in the breeze, No. 41 passed astern of the nearest of the destroyer screen eight hours from the time of setting out on her hazardous and successful operation.

Had she been entering harbour every warship within sight would have "manned ship" and cheered her with that tremendous and hearty vehemence that seems part and parcel of the British seamen's characteristics.

As the destroyer wasn't in port she didn't man ship, but all the same the crews, still alert at action stations, gave her such a rousing cheer that John felt a lump in his throat.

190 Operations Successfully Executed

Another two miles and the high shape of H.M.S. *Turpentine* came in sight in the faint glow of an Arctic twilight.

The wind had dropped. What there was was a following one. The sea was almost like glass except for a long gentle swell.

The hatch could be opened, letting in the cold but much-needed fresh air.

"What's that ahead, Skipper?" asked Hardy.

"The *Turpentine*, of course!"

"No, I don't mean her, sir! Something much nearer."

Thrusting head and shoulders through the hatchway, John levelled his night-glasses. In regions of darkness and semi-darkness prism binoculars were practically useless.

"It's Old Mumps' hooker, by Jupiter!" he declared. "We're overhauling her hand over fist. Trouble with her engines, I should imagine!"

Trouble or not it seemed a glorious sight; but their elation dropped when on drawing nearer they discovered it wasn't No. 49, but Shorty Frazer's craft.

As No. 41 drew abeam, John hailed his consort by megaphone.

"Bearing running hot," replied Frazer. "Good show, wasn't it? Where did you get to?"

"Went up Alten Fiord to fox old Fritz," replied John, proud of his successful ruse.

"So did we!" was Shorty's rejoinder, one that rather took the wind out of his "opposite number's" sails. "Hung around for the best part of an hour

before we made a dash for it. Hard lines on Mumps and his crowd, though!"

Evidently Nos. 41 and 45, unknown to each other, had taken practically the same course down the fiord with a time interval of only a quarter of an hour.

There was more cheering as the two midgets neared their parent ship, flying signals asking permission to enter their pen.

This being given, John ordered *dead slow ahead*. With plenty of room to spare, No. 41 glided between the wide-open doors into the electrically lighted hold where mooring parties were in readiness with heaving lines.

The commander was standing on one of the overhead catwalks.

"Good show, you fellows!" he sang out. "Pack up as soon as you can. The captain is waiting for your report, Seven Bells, so——"

The sentence remained unfinished.

A terrific roar, magnified within the metal walls of the hold and accompanied by a violent list and the sounds of shattering steel, told its own tale.

Simultaneously every light in the hold went out—as did every electric lamp in the ship.

Both midget submarines, caught by the resulting swirl of water, surged heavily against the side of the pen.

A couple of seconds after the first, another heavy, shattering explosion shook the ship.

She was steadily taking a list to starboard.

"Torpedoed!" thought John. "Those infernal

192 Operations Successfully Executed

U-boats we sighted when we were entering the fiord. If only we had been allowed to use our wireless! Wonder what our destroyers have been doing to let her get a sitting shot?"

He glanced down the hatch. In the interior of the submarine the lights were still burning. They were run from her dynamos and the cushion of water—since she hadn't settled on her bilge blocks—had saved them from being put out of action as was the case with those in her parent ship.

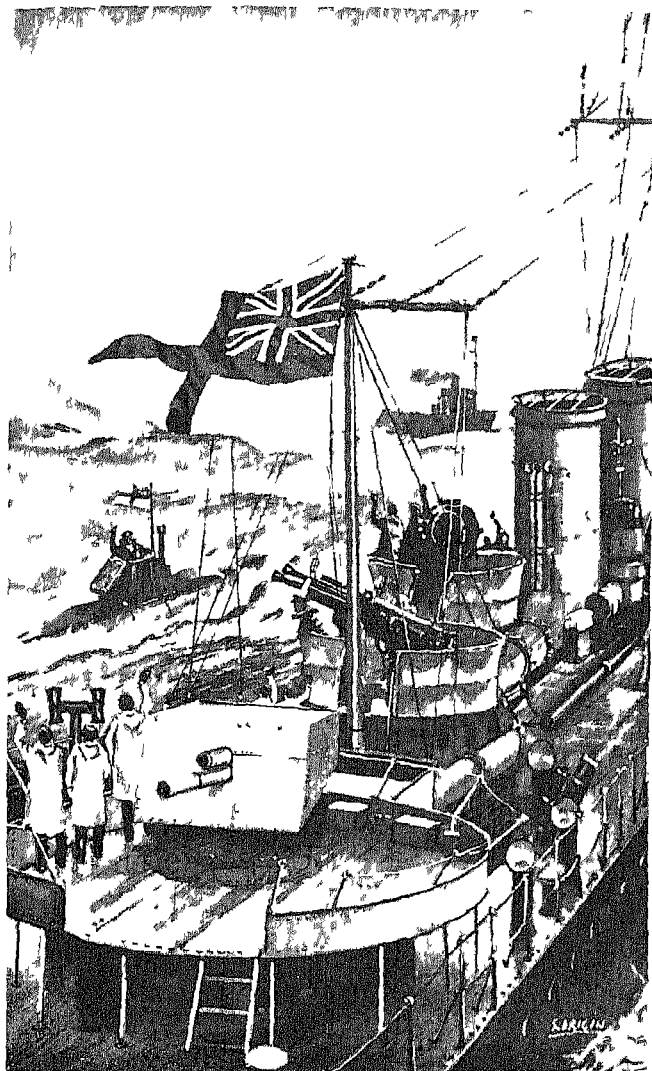
Joslin was standing by at his post, unmindful of the deadly peril.

Some of the working party, thrown into the surging water in the holds, could be heard shouting directions and encouragements to their comrades. What happened to the commander on the catwalk overhead was mere conjecture on John's part. Since the catwalk was now inclined at a steep angle—as was the ship—he might have been flung off; or he might have made his escape to his post on the upper deck through one of the doors between the pen and the main deck.

"What are we to do?" bawled Hardy in John's ear, in order to make himself heard above the crashing of gear that had broken adrift and the loud gurgling of intrushing water.

"Stand by till we get orders!" shouted John in reply. "Hang on!"

The warning came just in time, as the two midget submarines surged heavily against each other and then "fetched-up" against the now steeply inclined side of the hold.



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A GREAT RECEPTION

Page 183

"Successfully Carried Out" 193

"You there, Seven Bells?" hailed Lofty's voice through the darkness.

"Yes, I'm standing by."

"Seems the only thing to do. The catwalk's carried away. Part of it's across my deck aft!"

Just then from the upper deck of the doomed ship rang out the notes of a bugle sounding the *Still*. The immediate result was absolute quiet so far as the human element was concerned but a distinct increase in the volume of sound emanating from inanimate objects. Yet above the din arose a voice—faint though distinct to the crew of the two midget submarines.

"Every man for himself!"

It was perfectly evident that the end was near.

Through the darkness in the hold—a darkness mingled with clouds of steam from the port engine-room—John could just make out the sea without, showing wanly in the pale light. The doors of the pen were still wide open in spite of the heavy list. Over the sill water was pouring like a miniature Niagara.

It was quite obvious that escape to the upper deck by means of one of the catwalks was out of the question. The rope ladders, which were invisible in the darkness, were swaying out of reach of the two midgets' crews. In any case one catwalk had collapsed and in all probability the others were in a similar condition, buckled by the bulging of the side of the hold under the terrific pressure from without.

The captain had given the order for everyone to

194 Operations Successfully Executed

abandon ship. That had left John with a comparatively free hand; but it was obvious that he and his immediate comrades in distress couldn't join the rest of the ship's company as they dived overboard and struck out to gain as great a distance from the ship as possible before she made her final plunge.

Hit almost simultaneously by two torpedoes, she had quickly taken an alarming list. Her boats on the starboard side had been smashed, while those on the port side could not be lowered in time because of the angle at which she lay—an angle that was rapidly increasing.

Working coolly and collectedly, many of the ship's company had heaved rafts and other buoyant articles overboard as temporary refuges until the destroyer should close to rescue survivors from the icy-cold sea. They had a chance of being picked up. Cloche and Frazer, with their crews, didn't have that opportunity. They were trapped in the hold of the foundering ship.

Suddenly John did see a chance, although a very remote one; but he wasn't going to seize it unless he shared it with the crew of Shorty's craft. Dash it all! they must get out of this trap somehow. . . . Neither Shorty nor he had sent in their report to the captain concerning their attack on the enemy cruiser in Talvik Fiord. . . . They just couldn't dip for all time, without having done that.

The two little craft were still grinding together, with Shorty's pinned hard against one side of the hold.

"There, Shorty?" shouted John.

"Here!"

"Get below and batten down. Go full astern and you'll force your way out."

"What about you?"

"I'm having a jolly good shot at it! Look lively, there's no time to be lost!"

Hardy, hearing the first part of the conversation, had already jumped below. John followed, shutting and securing the hatch. Joslin, standing by the motor switchboard, seemed quite unperturbed.

Both submarines had entered their pen bows first. Consequently, if they were to get out, they would have to do so stern foremost. John, in spite of the tight corner in which he found himself, recalled the first time—it seemed years back—when he took one of the midget submarines out. How perturbed he was when she fouled the jamb of one of the pen gates and knocked off a square foot of paint. It didn't matter in the least now whether she bumped good and proper, provided she didn't stave her sides in against any obstruction that lay between her and the open sea—and safety!

"Half speed astern!" he ordered.

"Half speed astern it is, sir!" replied Joslin, his voice barely audible above the din from without.

Bumping and grinding, as the tumultuous in-rushing water flung her and her consort about like peas in a drum, the submarine began her bid for safety, until with an ominous rasping sound she seemed to stop dead. She hadn't hit anything stern

196 Operations Successfully Executed

on, but her heel had struck the now inclined sill of the entrance to the pen.

Normally when the hold was flooded to receive its complement of midgets, there was twelve feet of water over the sill. The submarine when on the surface drew six, therefore there should be a clearance of at least five feet.

There wasn't!

Then, horror-stricken, John "tumbled to it".

The *Turpentine*, as he knew, had taken on a heavy list to starboard. What he didn't know was that she was now well down by the head. Just before making her final plunge, she might recover from her list, but dive at a steep angle bows foremost.

Being down by the head her stern was correspondingly raised, so that the sill of the pen was temporarily almost awash. It was upon this artificial reef that No. 41 had stranded.

"Switch off!" he ordered and waited.

For the seemingly inevitable end? No; so far as John Cloche was concerned, while there was life there was hope.

The *Turpentine* was settling fast. That he knew. Also that when she plunged she would take both little craft with her. Riding light, they would be pinned against the deckhead of their parent ship until the increasing pressure of water crushed them like egg-shells. Vividly he remembered that fifteen fathoms was considered to be the margin of safety for this type of craft to operate.

Again an inspiration.

"Flood ballast tanks for running awash!"

Dimly wondering what his skipper thought he was doing, Trevor Hardy obeyed. Although he hadn't been long in the Royal Navy, his training had inculcated a readiness to obey orders smartly and without question.

By this time the little craft had been swept off the sill and was barging about somewhere in the hold. Where, exactly, John hadn't the faintest idea. All he hoped was that she hadn't been carried to the fore end by the intrushing, surging water.

A heavier bump, this time overhead, told him that the ship was plunging to the bottom. The midget, with a slight reserve of buoyancy, was grinding against the deckhead, normally fifty or sixty feet above the floor of the hold.

He watched the depth-gauge. So did Frazer. Joslin kept his eyes on his skipper, ready to act upon the next order—if there were a next one!

Steadily the needle of the depth-gauge swung round the dial . . . twenty . . . thirty . . . forty . . . fifty feet . . .

The deck of the submarine was now at a steep angle. The crew had to hang on to anything secure and within reach to prevent their feet sliding from under them.

. . . sixty . . . seventy (twenty more to go to safety point! thought John) . . . eighty . . . NINETY . . .

Still no rending of metal and terrific inrush of water.

The submarine tilted still more. Something carrying away from a rack struck John violently on

198 Operations Successfully Executed

the top of his head. For a moment everything went black until, through a white mist that swam before his eyes, he saw that the needle of the depth-gauge registered a hundred feet and was still moving.

Then, with a succession of horribly disconcerting, grinding noises, the little craft regained her normal trim, while rapidly the needle of the depth-gauge turned in the opposite direction until it registered zero!

She was on the surface, riding sluggishly to the long, sullen roll of the open sea.

Hardly able to realize that he was still alive and that the limit of deadly peril had been successfully overcome, Sub-Lieutenant Trevor Hardy extended his hand. He meant to congratulate John on their escape.

Instead he was just in time to prevent his superior officer dropping inert and senseless to the deck.

John Septimus Cloche, R.N.V.R., knew nothing of what was taking place during the next twelve hours: how Nos. 41 and 45 both broke free from the flooded hold of the foundering ship and came to the surface; how the crews of both craft, together with ninety per cent of H.M.S. *Turpentine's* ship's company, were picked up by the destroyers that raced to the rescue; or how the U-boat that had delivered the fatal blow had been promptly depth-charged and sunk for certain within the hour.

Nor did he know, until he recovered consciousness, that with other "cases" he had been tran-

shipped from the rescuing destroyer to the sick bay of one of the light cruisers.

"Where am I?" he inquired feebly.

"Aboard the *Conquest*, sir," replied one of the sick-berth attendants. "And don't you worry about nothing. Surgeon says as you must be kept quiet."

For perhaps five minutes John obeyed. He was trying to think quite a lot. Feebly he beckoned to his attendant.

"How many are saved?"

"Most all, sir. They say as them two midget subs bobbed up like corks after everyone thought they'd dipped for keeps."

"Is the captain safe?"

"Yes, sir; but don't you talk——"

"I am going to talk!" exclaimed the patient defiantly. "Get me a signal pad and a pencil."

"Now, sir, don't you get excited."

John, almost invariably even-tempered, stormed at the man.

"Did you hear me? I gave you an order."

The attendant, replying "Yes, sir!" sidled away, and confided to another sick-berth rating that he believed "that there officer was properly off his napper!"

"Best humour him, chum," suggested the other. "And report to the M.O. when he makes his rounds. Yes, humour him; that's my advice."

The signal pad and indelible pencil were accordingly given to the patient.

A swing cot in a ship's sick-bay wasn't an ideal place in which to indite a letter; nor was a man

200 Operations Successfully Executed

suffering from severe head contusions in a fit state to do much serious thinking—let alone writing.

But, will-power triumphing over present physical disability, John wrote:

“ To Officer Commanding H.M.S. *Turpentine*.

“ From John Septimus Cloche, Lieutenant,
R.N.V.R., Commanding——”

“ No, that won't do; better put ‘lately Commanding H.M. Submarine No. 41’.”

“ Sir,

“ I have the honour to inform you that operations against the German cruiser (name unknown) lying in Talvik Fiord have been successfully carried out. Torpedo hits were observed and when last seen the vessel was heavily on fire and in a sinking condition.”

His immediate duty done, John smiled happily as he handed the paper to the attendant, bidding him see that it was forwarded forthwith. Then, just before he fell into a sound sleep, personal matters obtruded themselves.

“ Wonder if this crack on the head will get me a drop of leave?” he asked of himself. “ I think I've earned it. Didn't do so badly, everything considered!”

